DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 092 UD 029 930

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|---|---|
| TITLE | Vietnamese Amerasian Resettlement. Education, Employment, and Family Outcomes in the United States. Report to Congressional Requesters. |
| INSTITUTION | General Accounting Office, Washington, DC. Program Evaluation and Methodology Div. |
| REPORT NO | GAO/PEMD-94-15 |
| PUB DATE | Mar 94 |
| NOTE | 85p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | U.S. General Accounting Office, P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20884-6015 (first copy free, additional copies $2 each). |
| PUB TYPE | Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC04 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Academic Achievement; *Asian Americans; Demography; Educationally Disadvantaged; *Employment Level; Health Needs; *Housing; *Immigrants; Job Skills; Limited English Speaking; Refugees; Social Services; *Vietnamese People |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Vietnamese Amerasians |

ABSTRACT

This report assesses both the process and outcomes of resettling Vietnamese Amerasians in the United States, particularly in the areas of education, employment, housing, and health care. The report also examines the factors that have been helpful or harmful to the successful resettlement of Amerasians. Findings show that, despite many networks and social agencies designed to help Amerasians in their resettlement, they have not overcome the difficulties that many Amerasians have experienced in trying to adjust to life in America. Three significant problems exist: low educational level, few or no job skills, and lack of English language proficiency. The Amerasians in this study expected to make strides in each of these areas but have not come close to reaching their goals, at least in the relatively short time they have been in the United States. The Amerasians in the study also tended to live in crowded housing in poor neighborhoods, had difficulty accessing available health care, lacked adequate transportation, and tended to associate only with other Amerasians and Vietnamese. The report suggests that it is important for the U.S. government to monitor and assess Amerasians' situations after resettlement and indicates that Congress may want to encourage the Department of Health and Human Services to determine what strategies are effective in addressing the needs of Amerasians. Appendices provide study methodology and statistical data. (GLR)

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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

March 1994

ED 371 092

# VIETNAMESE AMERASIAN RESETTLEMENT

## Education, Employment, and Family Outcomes in the United States

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**United States**
**General Accounting Office**
**Washington, D.C. 20548**

**Program Evaluation and**
**Methodology Division**

B-247548

March 31, 1994

The Honorable Romano L. Mazzoli
Chairman, Subcommittee on International Law,
Immigration, and Refugees
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

The Honorable Thomas J. Ridge
House of Representatives

About 75,000 Amerasians and members of their families have left Vietnam to resettle in the United States under the provisions of what is commonly called the "Amerasian Homecoming Act," enacted December 1987.[1] These Amerasians have special ties to the United States because their fathers were American citizens serving in Vietnam prior to 1976, and because these very ties caused them to suffer hardships and discrimination in Vietnam. You asked us to assess both the process and outcomes of resettling Vietnamese Amerasians in the United States.

We reported earlier (GAO/PEMD-93-10R) the findings from our evaluation of the process whereby eligible Amerasians and their families become participants in the resettlement program in Vietnam, receive language training and cultural orientation in the Philippines, and finally are resettled in the United States. In the present report, we focus on the outcomes for Amerasians and their families after resettlement has taken place, particularly with regard to education, employment, housing, and health care. We also examine the factors that have been helpful or harmful to the successful resettlement of Amerasians.

## Background

According to Toan Anh, one of the most often-cited authors on Vietnamese culture, Vietnamese care about their families more than about themselves.[2] Or, as Professor Thanh Van Tran of Boston College has similarly observed: "In traditional Vietnamese society, the [extended] family was the center of an individual's life and activities".[3] The bonding applies to the village as well, particularly regarding marriages. Dr. Tran quotes an old

[1]Section 584 of P.L. 100-202 (101 Stat. 1329-183).

[2]Vietnamese Customs: From Self to Family (Saigon: Dai Nam, 1969).

[3]"The Vietnamese American Family," in Charles H. Mindel et al. (eds.), Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations, 3rd ed. (New York: Elsevier, 1988).

Vietnamese saying, whose literal translation is: "It's better to marry a village dog than a rich man elsewhere."

Marriage to foreigners was thus a taboo, particularly for women. The shame of marrying a foreigner fell on the whole extended family, not just the woman. In addition, the taboo against having a child outside of marriage was strong, regardless of how stable the relationship was.

Most Amerasians were born into this social context. Furthermore, Amerasians and their families bore the burden of being closely linked to the United States, Communist Vietnam's enemy in the recent war. As a consequence of these various factors, Amerasians in Vietnam faced racial discrimination, received little formal education, and were generally impoverished.

Because Amerasians by birth have undisputed ties to the United States, and because of humanitarian concerns for their well-being, the Congress enacted the Amerasian Homecoming Act in December of 1987.[4] The law provides all individuals born after January 1, 1962, and before January 1, 1976, who were fathered by a U.S. citizen, and their close family members, the opportunity to resettle in the United States. Under the law, eligible Amerasians and their family members who depart Vietnam are admitted to the United States as immigrants and also receive refugee benefits such as cash and medical assistance. In 1987, when the law was passed, it was estimated that some 20,000 to 30,000 Amerasians and family members lived in Vietnam. As previously noted, a much larger number than this have already been resettled in the United States, and it is expected that there will be several thousand more applicants in the coming years. (However, there is no firm information about the number of Amerasians still remaining in Vietnam who want to resettle in the United States, and 80 to 90 percent of the applicants are currently rejected.)

Few efforts have thus far been undertaken to systematically study the Amerasian population in America. Accounts have been largely anecdotal and impressionistic. Resettlement workers have reported great diversity among Amerasians with regard to how well they adjust to life in the United States; some are concerned that many Amerasians have not been able to merge into the American social mainstream. They point out that Amerasians tend to remain within closed ethnic ghettos, in much the same way as earlier immigrant groups have behaved. They also note that,

[4]The title "Amerasian Homecoming Act" is employed throughout our report, although "Amerasian Immigration" is the term found in the legislation.

handicapped by a language barrier, as well as lack of education, job skills, and a stable and supportive family, these Amerasians have been unable to move beyond the lowest paying jobs and the poorest living conditions. Other resettlement workers, however, have reported that there is little or no evidence of criminal activity, violence, or substance abuse among Amerasians, and that a number of Amerasians have successfully completed school and/or job training programs and have moved on to good jobs.

## Program Description

As we noted in our earlier report (GAO/PEMD-93-10R), the process of resettling Amerasians starts in Vietnam, continues in the Philippines, and ends in the United States. The Vietnamese government is responsible for disseminating information about the program to the population in Vietnam, making arrangements for Amerasians to sign up at local government offices, and providing U.S. officials with lists of applicants. Teams of U.S. officials then interview Amerasians and family members in Ho Chi Minh City and approve or reject cases based on supporting evidence and available documentation, as well as on the physical appearance of Amerasian applicants. Cases that are approved are processed for departure to the Philippines Refugee Processing Center (PRPC), where Amerasian families spend about 6 months receiving training in the English language, American culture, and job orientation.

In our earlier review of the Amerasian resettlement program in Vietnam, we found that, although the program has successfully processed a large number of Amerasians and family members, some Amerasians are still in Vietnam and are difficult to reach because of their poor education, their remote location in rural areas of the country, or their loss of faith in the resettlement process caused by their being rejected in an earlier interview. We also found that the program has been quite expensive for participants, who typically had to pay for such things as transportation to the interview site in Ho Chi Minh City and fees to local Vietnamese government officials in order to be placed on interview lists.

Another serious problem with the program has been the large number of fraud cases, including those involving so-called "fake" families—that is, people pretending to be related to Amerasians in order to secure eligibility under the 1987 law to emigrate to the United States. Although U.S. government officials have implemented more stringent measures to prevent fraud from occurring (resulting in a high rate of rejection among

applicants), there is some risk that, by so doing, valid applicants have been turned away.

While Amerasians are in the PRPC, their files are sent to the Refugee Data Center (RDC) in the United States, which then places them with one of the national resettlement agencies. These nonprofit agencies have cooperative agreements with the Department of State to resettle and assist various refugee groups. Those Amerasians with relatives in the United States are resettled near their relatives with the help of a local affiliate agency. The majority, who do not have relatives in this country, are called "free cases" and are distributed to local affiliate agencies throughout the United States. About two thirds of the cases are resettled in designated cluster sites across the country. These cluster sites, which total about 55, have been designated by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as areas that have a sufficient social service network and a core of previously resettled Amerasians. Both of these conditions are viewed as important for the successful resettlement of newly arrived Amerasian families.

The Department of State provides the voluntary resettlement agencies with grants ($588 per person in fiscal year 1992) to assist Amerasian families in securing basic needs during their first 30 days in this country. Agencies are required to ensure that arriving families receive specific services, called core services, which include food, clothing, and shelter for the initial 30 days in the United States, as well as counseling and referral services. Agencies can and do vary the level or type of assistance they provide directly to the family, so long as core service requirements are met. The Department of State grant is intended to cover both the cost of direct assistance and the resettlement agency's administrative and service-delivery expenses.

Upon arrival in the United States, Amerasians are generally provided with housing for the first month, as well as some cash for food, transportation, and other household expenses. They are given a medical examination and referred for treatment, if necessary, under Medicaid, for such things as lice, worms, and tuberculosis. Children are placed in schools, and adults are encouraged to secure employment as soon as possible. Assistance in locating jobs is provided through resettlement agencies, job developer contractors, volunteers, and other social contacts (primarily in the Vietnamese community). Those Amerasians who are unable to secure employment are given AFDC benefits, if eligible, or refugee cash and medical assistance, which is available for a maximum of 8 months. (The maximum period of eligibility for federally funded refugee cash and

medical assistance has gradually been reduced—from 18 months in 1988, to 12 months in 1990, to 8 months in 1992.) Refugee cash and medical assistance is funded by HHS and administered through the states and voluntary agencies. Amerasians are also eligible to participate in the many federal, state, and local government assistance programs that provide education, job training, and social services to low income, minority, and other population groups.

## Scope and Methodology

To examine how Amerasians and their families have adjusted to life in the United States, we relied on different sources of information and a number of evaluation methods. We made use of available program data sets, conducted structured interviews with a sample of Amerasians, used comparison group analyses, included case studies on specific issues, surveyed local resettlement agency workers, and interviewed various government officials. Because each source of information had its strengths and weaknesses, we used a combination of sources in our study. Information on methods and sources is summarized in table 1 and described in more detail in appendix I.

**Table 1: Methods and Data Sources**

| Method | Source | Sample size | Purpose |
|---|---|---|---|
| Use of extant data | Refugee Data Center | Total population of Amerasians and family members in the United States by March 1992 (47,299) | Demographic information, selection of sites for structured interviews, sample selection for interviews |
| Structured interviews | Amerasians in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. | Sample of 100 | In-depth resettlement experience, from beneficiaries' perspective |
| | Comparison group 1: non-Amerasian siblings of Amerasians in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. | Sample of 25 | To control for cultural and family variables in order to relate physical difference (Amerasian versus Vietnamese) to any observed social effects (such as discrimination) |
| | Comparison group 2: "other Vietnamese" in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. | Sample of 30 | To control for cultural variables in order to examine family variables alone |
| Case studies | Subset of structured interview samples | Vocational training students (10) | Outcome of promising educational programs |
| | | Persistently employed (15) and unemployed (12) persons | Best case-worst case comparison |
| | | Family relations (3) | Examples of family conflict and harmony |
| Mail survey | All resettlement agencies for Amerasians | 78-percent response rate (128 of 164 agencies) | Accumulated experience of resettlement over time and over many cases, from social workers' point of view |
| Interviews with officials | Government agencies and contractors | 25 international, federal, state, and local agencies, both governmental and nongovernmental | To coordinate the study, identify data sources, generate hypotheses, and obtain administrative perspective |
| Field observation | Study team | Sites in the United States, the Philippines, and Vietnam | To generate hypotheses and explore possible explanations |

We first analyzed extant data from the Refugee Data Center (RDC) to obtain basic demographic characteristics (gender, age, family composition, and so on) and resettlement information (site, time of arrival, sponsoring agency, and so on) for the entire Amerasian population resettled in the United States, as of 1992. These data provided a useful profile of the Amerasian population that arrived in the United States; however, they did not contain information on the condition of Amerasians after their arrival

in the United States. To obtain such information, we relied on two principal sources: a sample of Amerasians themselves and the local resettlement agencies that assisted them.

We selected two major resettlement sites and conducted structured interviews with a sample of Amerasians in each location. We chose Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, because these cities contained large numbers of Amerasians (who had demographic characteristics similar to the overall population of Amerasians, including numbers of those whose physical appearance was predominantly "white" or "black") and a diversity of resettlement and other social service agencies in place. With assistance from the RDC, the local resettlement agencies in both cities, and community organizations, we contacted and interviewed (using Vietnamese-speaking interviewers) a sample of 100 Amerasians. We designed our interviews to collect information on each subject's educational and employment history, family status, and other variables that profile the resettlement experience. The effort here was to obtain rich, in-depth information, based on personal experience, from as diverse a sample as possible.

We also compared the Amerasian sample with two other samples drawn in Washington and Philadelphia, using a similar structured-interview format. A sample of 25 non-Amerasian siblings of Amerasians was used to try to relate physical difference (Amerasian versus Vietnamese) to any social effects found (discrimination, for example). Another sample—composed of 30 "other Vietnamese" who were not part of an Amerasian family but were similar in terms of age and time of arrival—was used to control for cultural variables in order to isolate family variables for examination.

In addition, we drew on case studies from specific subsamples of the three interviewed groups (Amerasians, non-Amerasian siblings of Amerasians, and "other Vietnamese") to illustrate important issues or show the complexity of variable interactions. With respect to education, for example, we looked more closely at those in the interview samples who participated in vocational training programs. In the area of employment, we described some of the best cases and worst cases—namely, those who were persistently employed or unemployed during their first 2 years in the United States. With regard to family relationships, we highlighted some extreme cases where conflict or harmony predominated.

To obtain a different perspective on the resettlement of Amerasians, and to create a type of validating mechanism to compare against the results of

the first set of interviews, we collected information on the varied efforts and experiences of the local resettlement agencies. We conducted a national survey, using a mailed questionnaire, of the 164 agencies that were involved in resettling Amerasian cases in 1991 and 1992. We asked respondents to provide information on the services they have provided to Amerasians, the nature and extent of problems, if any, that Amerasians have faced, and the approaches they have tried in helping Amerasians overcome these problems. We received responses from 78 percent of the agencies.

In addition, we interviewed various government and nongovernment officials involved in the resettlement of Amerasians and their families in order to coordinate the study, identify data sources, generate hypotheses, and obtain administrative perspectives. We met with officials from the Departments of State and Health and Human Services (HHS) who are responsible for implementing the resettlement program and providing assistance to Amerasians. We also conducted site visits to Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines to learn about the process that program applicants go through before reaching the United States. Furthermore, we interviewed many officials associated with the various nonprofit organizations that provide training, sponsorship, and resettlement assistance to Amerasians and other refugee groups. These included representatives from the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), World Relief Refugee Service (WRRS), InterAction, and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Our methods were thus largely qualitative. We designed the study this way to learn as much as possible about a generally unstudied population for whom randomization was impossible. The use of different methods—interviews of the study population, validation by observer groups, comparisons using non-Amerasian siblings and "other" Vietnamese, and case studies on specific topics to delve into reasons for behavior observed—reinforced the conclusiveness of our findings. That is, findings based on any one of the methods, used alone, would be much less persuasive. Nonetheless, the samples are small (particularly for our interviews with Amerasians, non-Amerasian siblings, and "other Vietnamese"), and our inability to randomize means that our findings cannot be generalized beyond the population studied.

## Summary of Results

In Vietnam, Amerasians generally suffered from discrimination, poor education, and disfunctional families; the purpose of the Amerasian

Homecoming Act was to help by providing them with an opportunity to resettle in the United States. Yet, as past experience has shown, the process of moving to a new country creates its own difficulties. It separates immigrants from their families—because their family members are not always able or willing to resettle—as well as from their language and culture. In the case of Amerasian immigration, the U.S. government and the network of resettlement and social service agencies have made many special efforts to assist Amerasians and their families. However, we found that, although these efforts have helped, they have not overcome the difficulties that many Amerasians in our sample have experienced in trying to adjust to life in America.

In our national survey of resettlement agencies, respondents reported that the three most significant problems for Amerasians entering the United States—in descending order of magnitude—are low educational level, few or no job skills, and lack of English language proficiency. The Amerasians we studied expected to improve their education, learn English, and acquire job skills once they arrived in this country. Most, however, have not come close to achieving these goals, at least in the relatively short time they have been here in the United States.

In terms of education, about one fifth of the Amerasians in our sample (19 percent) were able to continue with or graduate from either high school or a job training program; none attended college. The other four fifths of the Amerasian immigrants either never enrolled in any educational program, completed only minimal English language training, or attended an educational program but dropped out before completing it. In comparison, about two fifths of the other groups whom we studied were continuing students or graduates.

Though Amerasians were at a distinct educational disadvantage in both Vietnam and the United States, they for the most part were able to find employment in the United States. Resettlement agency workers reported that a lack of job opportunities was a problem for only about 30 percent of the Amerasians they helped to resettle. At 8 months after arrival in the United States, the employment rate among Amerasians in our sample was about 65 percent, and it stayed slightly above this level at the 1- and 2-year points after arrival. These Amerasians, however, tended to have low paying, unskilled jobs that provided little training or opportunity for advancement.

An important question concerning the economic self-sufficiency of Amerasian immigrants is the extent to which they improve their condition over time. In our study group, we did not see much improvement, partly because of the group's reasonably high initial employment rate, partly because of its steadily increasing number of unemployed single mothers receiving public assistance, and partly because of its overall lack of educational success. When we compared Amerasians in our sample with their siblings and other Vietnamese peers, we saw that fewer Amerasians attended school and fewer of those who were unemployed found jobs over time. One important factor that may account for the low educational achievement of many Amerasians was lack of family support. Amerasians in our sample who dropped out of educational programs were also the ones most likely to have family conflicts. The impact of social discrimination and family disfunction, which handicapped many of these Amerasians in Vietnam, continued to be an important handicap for them in the United States. (See appendix VI.)

Despite their difficulties and underachievement relative to comparison groups, almost two thirds of the Amerasians in our study reported being happy with their lives in the United States because they suffer less discrimination, have more freedom, and experience fewer material needs than they would had they stayed in Vietnam. The majority of Amerasians we interviewed (71 percent) indicated that they had faced harsh discrimination in Vietnam and reported specific examples of such treatment. However, only 19 percent of them noted that discrimination was a problem for them in the United States. Nevertheless, Amerasians emphasized that they identified most closely with the Vietnamese culture and associated primarily with other Amerasians and Vietnamese, rather than with other Americans, in their daily activities. Like other immigrants before them, they said that they missed the social environment and cultural surroundings within which they had grown up.

## Principal Findings

### Education

For the most part, Amerasians came to the United States with very little educational background. In our sample, 48 percent had received less than a 6th grade education in Vietnam as compared with 13 percent for the two comparison groups combined (5 of the 25 siblings and 2 of the 30 other Vietnamese). (See table 2.) Among the 19 black Amerasians in the sample,

the level of education was even lower, with 14 members of this subgroup having received less than a sixth grade education in Vietnam. (This deficit among black Amerasians was not due to age or sex, because the age and sex distributions for black and white Amerasians were similar.)

**Table 2: Highest Educational Level Attained in Vietnam and in the United States, by Refugee Group**

| | Amerasian | | Sibling | | Other Vietnamese | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Highest educational level** | **Number** | **Percent** | **Number** | **Percent** | **Number** | **Percent** |
| In Vietnam | | | | | | |
| 0-2 years | 17 | 17 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 3-5 years | 31 | 31 | 4 | 16 | 2 | 7 |
| 6-8 years | 39 | 39 | 13 | 52 | 8 | 27 |
| 9-12 years | 13 | 13 | 5 | 20 | 15 | 50 |
| College | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 5 | 17 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **25** | **100** | **30** | **100** |
| In the U.S. | | | | | | |
| None | 26 | 26 | 6 | 24 | 4 | 13 |
| English | 37 | 37 | 3 | 12 | 12 | 40 |
| High school | 23 | 23 | 11 | 44 | 6 | 20 |
| Vocational school | 14 | 14 | 4 | 16 | 2 | 7 |
| College | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 20 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **25** | **100** | **30** | **100** |

Amerasians expected that they would receive additional education or job training after resettling in the United States. About 37 percent indicated that they had expected to receive some kind of job training, while another 36 percent expected some formal English language training. However, Amerasians (as well as other refugee groups) are encouraged to find jobs and support themselves as soon as possible after arrival in the United States, which can make it difficult to take advantage of available educational opportunities.

With regard to educational achievement in the United States, table 2 also shows that 26 percent of the Amerasians in our sample never received any education or training, 37 percent attended only some English language courses, 23 percent (primarily those who were under 18 years of age) went to high school, 14 percent enrolled in a job training program, and none went to college. In contrast, among the sibling and other Vietnamese comparison groups, there were fewer (18 percent) who failed to receive

any education or training in the United States, and a small number (13 percent) enrolled in college.

Of those Amerasians who received English language training, about 75 percent attended courses for only a short time and then did not continue their education any further. Most of these participants acquired only limited English language skills, according to their own self-assessment and that of our interviewers. Among the group that went to high school, there was a high dropout rate: Almost half failed to complete their school program. Finally, among the few who pursued job training, there were more dropouts (7) than graduates (4), and only one of the graduates found employment in the area of his training.

Although most of the Amerasians in our study did not advance their education in the United States, not all did so poorly. We found that 19 percent of the Amerasian group was either still in school at the time of our interviews or had graduated from an educational program. The sibling and other Vietnamese comparison groups, however, did far better, once again, in terms of educational achievement. (Forty-two percent were still in school or had graduated at the time of our interviews.)

The reasons for the poor educational achievement of Amerasians we studied are varied and complex. Overall, we found that the following factors had a favorable but weak influence on education in the United States: being non-Amerasian, having more education in Vietnam, arriving in the United States at a younger age, and being a woman. Family situation, on the other hand, appeared more strongly related. In our sample, Amerasians who dropped out of school reported more family problems than those who continued their education. These findings, along with the quantitative results given previously (and described in appendix III), are again reinforced by the findings from our case studies.

We focused on those individuals in our interview samples who began their education in the United States with vocational training. Job training programs appeared to be particularly important for Amerasians because few had useful job skills upon arrival in the United States and their educational backgrounds were too weak for more academic programs such as those offered by colleges. Ten people in our interview samples (including 8 Amerasians, 1 non-Amerasian sibling, and 1 other Vietnamese) began their education in the United States with vocational training. Of these 10, 4 had dropped out, 3 had graduated, and 3 were still being trained at the time of our interview.

Of the four cases who dropped out, all were Amerasians. The first individual who dropped out was illiterate even in Vietnamese and had no education in Vietnam. Her family—including her mother, adopted father, an older brother, and two younger half-siblings—remained in Vietnam, but she came to the United States because she had experienced discrimination in Vietnam against her black skin and American connection. At the time of our interview, she was unemployed, trying to learn some English on her own, and worrying about the future, but she did not want to go back to Vietnam. In this case, both poor educational background and a lack of family support in the United States made her desire for vocational training a practical impossibility, regardless of her efforts.

The next individual, a white Amerasian with a fifth grade education, who left his mother in Vietnam and came to the United States alone, began to study welding within a month of his arrival. He subsequently dropped out of his training program to take an entry-level job and later told our interviewer that he was saving money for tuition in order to reenroll in a vocational training program to qualify as a welder. In this case, the Amerasian stated he would have been able to stay in school had he had a supportive family in the United States to contribute both money and encouragement.

A third individual in this group, a white Amerasian, had completed ninth grade and 4 years of English language instruction in Vietnam. He came to the United States with his mother and a stepfather who was more than 30 years older than his mother. He had an intense conflict with the stepfather who, he said, abused his mother. In this case, although the family was present, it offered little support to the Amerasian.

The fourth individual, a white Amerasian who had an eighth grade education and 4 months of English language instruction in Vietnam, was the only dropout in the group who displayed no indication of family problems. In 2 years, he was able to make some progress towards obtaining a General Educational Development (GED) diploma, but he dropped out after completing only a small part of the technical training program. The school then referred him to an entry-level job that required no training. In this case, family support enabled the Amerasian to remain in the training program for a considerable period (2 years). However, his slow progress towards completing the program was a factor in his dropping out.

In contrast to the dropouts, the three members of our sample who graduated from a training program all had families with whom they reported getting along well. Two of the individuals, an Amerasian and a non-Amerasian sibling, received very limited training: 1 month of sewing and 3 months of shirt sleeve assembly. Both, however, were unable to make use of their training and were employed in unskilled jobs. The third graduate, a non-Amerasian Vietnamese woman, was the only example of clear success. She had graduated from a cosmetology program, was able to find work that fit her training, and was using the income from her job to help finance a college education. She had a strong educational background in Vietnam and a large supportive family in the United States.

Although job training programs such as Job Corps exist, there were not enough opportunities for Amerasians (as shown by the difference between the 37 percent of our sample who expected training and the 14 percent who received any form of it), while those who were able to attend programs experienced problems in completing them. Some of the former Job Corps students in our sample said that one of their reasons for dropping out was their inability to acquire enough facility with English to get into the job training program itself. They also mentioned feeling lost, homesick, and misunderstood in a foreign environment where no one knew the Vietnamese language or culture, as well as discouraged by the fact that even graduates of the program had difficulty finding jobs.

A teacher in one Job Corps program that accepted several Amerasian and Vietnamese students confirmed the language problem and added other observations: (1) There were few openings in technical programs and thus great competition for such openings, so Amerasians with weak English skills had little chance of getting in; (2) one teacher could speak Vietnamese, but her language skills were not much used; (3) the placements into the program were probably not appropriate, so Amerasians with very weak academic backgrounds were admitted and subsequently might remain in the program for years without passing the English requirement; and finally (4) while going through the long English language course, Amerasian students could not learn anything technical, which was their real interest. The same teacher noted that real improvements could be made via better placement, greater flexibility to start some form of technical training along with English language instruction, and the presence of a counselor who spoke Vietnamese. (Vietnamese, including Amerasians, constituted the largest student group at that school.)

Appendix III provides more information on education.

## Employment

Although Amerasians came to the United States with few job skills, a majority of those in our study sample (58 percent) expected that jobs would not be hard to find, and in fact, a majority (60 percent) were employed at the time of interview. The resettlement agencies responding to our national survey estimated that, of all the Amerasians they had helped to resettle (in 1991 and 1992) and with whom they were still in contact, 76 percent were employed after 1 year and 81 percent after 2 years. In our interview sample, after excluding all students, 74 percent of Amerasians were employed after 1 year and 69 percent after 2 years. The Amerasians we studied who did find jobs tended to find them relatively soon after resettlement, somewhere between the second and eighth month. The types of job tended to be mostly low-paying ones, such as housekeeping in hotels, dishwashing in restaurants, and assembly line work in factories. The average starting hourly wage was $5.71; the average current wage (at the time of our interviews) was $6.54. Respondents reported learning some skills on the job; however, there was little formal training available.

The factors most commonly cited by the Amerasians in our sample as helpful in gaining employment were having contacts, willingness to work any time for low pay, and being pleasant with others. (See table 3.) The primary sources of contacts were the resettlement agencies, sponsors assigned by the agencies, and Vietnamese friends in the community. The difficulties in obtaining work cited were poor English skills, lack of experience, lack of transportation, and the presence of children. English was considered to be important not in terms of the ability to do the work, but rather in terms of making contacts, filling out applications, and having successful interviews with prospective employers. Transportation was also a problem because many of our interviewees relied on public transportation and job opportunities were often in difficult to reach locations or were conducted during night shifts when public transportation was not available.

Table 3: Hindering and Helpful Factors for Employment in the United States, by Refugee Group

| | Group | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment factor | Amerasian[a] | Sibling[b] | Other Vietnamese[c] | Total |
| Hindering | | | | |
| Not having transportation | 23 | 8 | 8 | **39** |
| Having a child | 12 | 1 | 0 | **13** |
| Not having a phone | 3 | 2 | 2 | **7** |
| Not having English language skills | 40 | 10 | 6 | **56** |
| Not having experience | 29 | 5 | 9 | **43** |
| Having school hours that conflict with work hours | 3 | 0 | 7 | **10** |
| Other | 10 | 2 | 4 | **16** |
| Helpful | | | | |
| Having contacts | 65 | 11 | 16 | **92** |
| Having experience | 4 | 0 | 6 | **10** |
| Having learned well in the PRPC | 2 | 3 | 2 | **7** |
| Having resettlement agency support during interviews | 4 | 4 | 0 | **8** |
| Having a flexible schedule | 41 | 13 | 9 | **63** |
| Having job skills | 2 | 1 | 5 | **8** |
| Having a pleasant demeanor | 27 | 9 | 11 | **47** |
| Having English language skills | 9 | 1 | 6 | **16** |
| Having low pay expectations | 44 | 10 | 11 | **65** |
| Other | 17 | 2 | 4 | **23** |

[a]Number = 100.

[b]Number = 25.

[c]Number = 30.

We examined several factors—year of arrival, educational background, resettlement site, and gender—to determine whether they affected differences in employment status for those in our sample. Although some resettlement experts have noted that employment rates among refugee groups often start off low and then increase over time (because of the period needed for adjustment), we found partial evidence that the employment rate for Amerasians was higher among the more recent arrivals than among those who resettled earlier. Only 40 percent of the Amerasians in our sample who arrived in 1989 or earlier were employed at the time of our interviews, as compared with 58 percent and 73 percent,

respectively, of those who arrived in 1990 and 1991. The differences may be the result of greater governmental emphasis in the last few years on early self-sufficiency. Another important factor, however, is the correlation between an increase in the percentage of single Amerasian mothers receiving Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) and length of residence in the United States. Our small sample shows a consistent increase in the rate of AFDC recipients among Amerasian women, and that rate is much higher than the rate among siblings or other Vietnamese. (See table IV.6 for more information on Amerasian AFDC recipients.)

Since most jobs that Amerasians in our sample secured required neither English language skills nor significant education, those with poor educational backgrounds were not necessarily worse off in terms of finding employment. For example, black Amerasians consistently had the highest rate of employment. However, a lower percentage of Amerasian women in our study were employed (41 percent) as compared with Amerasian men (78 percent), partially at least because many Amerasian women were single mothers (as previously described). Another factor may have been cultural: in Vietnam, the expectation is for men to be the main breadwinners, while women run the domestic households.

In order to look more closely at the employment situation for Amerasians, we focused on two subgroups from our interview samples that represent extreme cases: those who were either persistently not employed or employed since arrival. We included in these groups those individuals who were either working or not working at all four of the checkpoints covered in our study (2 months, 8 months, 1 year, and 2 years after arrival). There were 15 in the not working and 12 in the working group.

Among the nonworkers, there were 4 men and 11 women. Of the 4 men, 3 were students (1 Vietnamese in college and 2 Amerasians in the Job Corps), and another Amerasian lived with a girlfriend and their child, who were on AFDC. Of the 11 nonworking women, 6 had children and boyfriends. Of these 6 (4 of whom were Amerasians), 5 were on AFDC, and a sixth was pregnant and anticipating AFDC. Of the other 5, 2 had children but no steady boyfriends and were on AFDC (1 had 2 children fathered by 2 different men, both of whom had left her); 2 were students (1 Vietnamese in job training and 1 Amerasian taking English courses); the other one had received a month of vocational training in clothing assembly but could not use it. This last individual eventually found a job about 2-1/2 years after arrival and had held it for over a year by the time of the interview. Two

tentative and related conclusions can be arrived at with regard to our sample: Gender played a big role, and family situation was important. While most nonworking men went to school (3 out of 4), most nonworking women took care of children (8 out of 11). Most of those women with children (6 of 8) lived with the children's fathers, and most (7 of 8) received AFDC support.

There were 10 men and 2 women who were working at all four of the time periods, of whom 8 were Amerasians. All 12 individuals indicated that they had close relationships with their families (3 of the men were married), and all were still working at the time of interview. Their average starting salary was $6.08 per hour, and at the time of interview, they averaged $8.22 per hour. Their job categories varied: Three worked in electronic assembly, 2 in meat processing, 2 in car parts, 2 in welding, 1 in carpentry, 1 in sewing, and 1 in a hotel. Their educational backgrounds in Vietnam varied, although 4 of the 12 had less than a sixth grade education. (The proportion was 7 of 15 in the persistent nonworker group.) All but two had received no schooling in the United States. All members of the persistent worker group started with jobs that did not require English, education, or experience. Nine remained in their first jobs, one resigned to accept a similar job, and one lost a number of jobs but found others. Only one changed to a better job.

This last case was different in many respects. The Amerasian in question was an orphan whose mother had died when he was seven, so he had only a first grade education. He somehow managed to learn how to read and write Vietnamese, though with difficulty. He came to the United States alone. His profile of no family and low education was not promising, yet his achievement was remarkable and was due at least in part to the unusual social ties he made in the United States.

The resettlement agency introduced him to an American couple who developed and maintained a close relationship with him. Soon after arrival in the United States, he married an educated Vietnamese woman, and they had a child. His first job, in a shipping and receiving department, did not require English, experience, or training. He received job training at the same time. After 1 year, he took a job as a metal worker, which required English. His third job was in the field for which he was trained, welding. This job required English, training, and experience.

This Amerasian rated his first two jobs as "easy" and liked them "okay." He found the third job very challenging and liked it very much. In responding

to the open-ended question stem, "What I like about myself is-," he wrote "that I have been able to do the job that I wished for." Yet, he wanted to advance further: His plan for the next year was to learn more English and pass the GED test; after 3 years, it was to learn underwater welding; and for 10 years later, "becoming a United States citizen."

Appendix IV provides more information on employment.

## Housing and Health Care

Upon arrival in the United States, Amerasian families are provided with housing by the resettlement agencies for at least the first month. Thereafter, families pay their own housing costs either through the refugee cash assistance they receive or from income earned from employment. Housing costs are the biggest part of living expenses for Amerasian families, taking up most of the cash assistance they receive. To minimize expenses, many families live in poor neighborhoods and share apartments with other families.

The areas where Amerasians reside often contain large concentrations of other Amerasians and Vietnamese. The Amerasians in our sample indicated that, by seeking out concentrated Vietnamese neighborhoods in which to reside, they were able to maintain social contacts and to feel part of a community. Our national survey of resettlement agencies showed that affordable housing was more of a problem for Amerasians in larger cities than in smaller ones. Agency workers estimated that an average of 17 percent of Amerasians they helped to resettle experienced difficulty in finding affordable housing in cities of less than 100,000 population, as compared with 37 percent experiencing this difficulty in cities of over 500,000 population.

Comprehensive health care was provided to Amerasians during the initial steps of the resettlement process. After resettlement in the United States, however, their lack of information, English language skills, and transportation made health care difficult to obtain for most Amerasians in our interview sample. Mental health care was even more difficult for Amerasians to secure, and was the unmet need most commonly cited by resettlement agencies.

Appendix V provides more information on housing and health care.

## Conclusions

The Amerasian Homecoming Act has been successful in bringing a large number of Amerasians and their family members to the United States. The combined efforts of the various agencies involved in resettlement have helped Amerasians and their families adjust to a new life and cultural setting. The Amerasians in our sample were relatively happy in the United States, reporting that their quality of life had improved compared with what it would have been had they stayed in Vietnam. Better employment opportunities, fewer material needs, less discrimination, and greater freedom were some of the factors they cited in support of this judgment. In addition, from an objective perspective, these Amerasians have done reasonably well with respect to employment, with about 60 percent able to find work within a relatively short time.

The Amerasians we studied came to the United States poorly equipped in terms of language, education, job skills, and family support. This last problem, in particular, has made it difficult for Amerasians to take advantage of available educational opportunities, find jobs (other than the entry-level, low-pay sort), and generally become integrated into the American community. The Amerasians we interviewed tended to live in crowded housing in poor neighborhoods, had difficulty accessing available health care, lacked adequate transportation, and tended to associate only with other Amerasians and Vietnamese. At the same time, they expressed longings for the relationships, families, language, food, and climate they had left behind in Vietnam.

Amerasians and their families only began arriving in the United States in large numbers in 1989, so most have not been here for very long. It is too soon to tell whether Amerasians can improve their condition over time or face the prospect of lifelong social and economic marginality. Although Amerasians have made some gains relative to their situation in Vietnam, further gains may be more difficult to secure if they cannot acquire basic language, education, and job skills. The Amerasians in our sample expressed an eagerness to learn English and to receive job training. This is a strength that could be turned to good advantage. However, their persistence in school and work and their general well-being can largely depend on family support and social contacts.

## Matter for Congressional Consideration

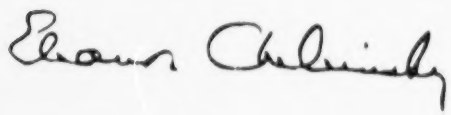
Given that the purpose of the Amerasian Homecoming Act was to offer Amerasians the opportunity to come to the United States and to help them get resettled once they arrived here, it is important that the U.S. government monitor and assess their situation after resettlement. Studies

like this one provide a first step in examining how well Amerasians are doing in this country. The Congress may wish, therefore, to encourage the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to determine what strategies are effective in addressing the needs of Amerasians—particularly the needs identified here in the areas of job training and social support systems—and then to monitor their progress.

## Agency Comments

HHS and the Department of State provided oral comments on a draft of our report. Both agencies agreed in general with our findings and conclusions. They also provided technical comments, which we have incorporated in our report.

We are sending copies of this report to HHS and the Department of State, as well as to others who are interested. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please call me at (202) 512-2900 or Kwai-Cheung Chan, Director of Program Evaluation in Physical Systems Areas, at (202) 512-3092.



Eleanor Chelimsky
Assistant Comptroller General

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## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ACNS | American Council for Nationalities Service |
| AFDC | Aid to Families With Dependent Children |
| GED | General Educational Development |
| HHS | Department of Health and Human Services |
| ICMC | International Catholic Migration Commission |
| IRC | International Rescue Committee |
| LIRS | Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service |
| ORR | Office of Refugee Resettlement |
| PRPC | Philippines Refugee Processing Center |
| RDC | Refugee Data Center |
| USCC | U.S. Catholic Conference |
| WRRS | World Relief Refugee Service |

# Methodology

In conducting this study, we used a combination of methods: analyses of extant data, structured interviews, case studies, mailed survey, interviews with officials, and field observation. This appendix discusses how each method was used.

## Extant Data From the Refugee Data Center (RDC)

RDC, a Department of State contractor located in New York City, maintains a database that contains certain basic demographic information on all refugees coming into the United States. From this data set, we obtained a general description of all Amerasians entering the United States (1988-92) in terms of such variables as age, sex, number and category of accompanying family members, arrival date, resettlement location, name of sponsoring agency, and educational background. However, RDC does not track refugees after resettlement, so we consulted other sources for resettlement outcome data.

## Structured Interviews With an Amerasian Population Sample and Comparison Groups

The main data source in our report is a sample of the Amerasians themselves. Since Amerasians are scattered all over the United States, and many move within the same city or to other cities after resettlement, a true random sample would be, practically speaking, impossible to obtain. To make our data collection feasible, we limited the geographic area sampled to two cities with fairly large concentrations of Amerasians. The RDC data gave us the Amerasian population characteristics for the entire United States, as well as those for each city. We selected two large cities—Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.—with general Amerasian profiles similar to that of the overall Amerasian population in the United States.

Our next step was to select a sample as close to random as possible in each of the two cities. RDC data again provided us with the name of each Amerasian family and the resettlement agency that sponsored them, in each city. We then took a random sample from the RDC list of names for each city, and subsequently contacted the resettlement agencies for the addresses of the Amerasians selected. Unfortunately, the agencies varied widely with regard to the availability and accuracy of their current records. As a result, we could not obtain address information for many of the names included in our list. We therefore had to make various modifications to our sampling plan.

In Philadelphia, we sampled from a list of refugees that the agencies provided, and even then many addresses were not current. Consequently,

we had to go through about 200 names (sorted into random order) in order to find 44 Amerasians. Halfway through the process, when we realized that a large number of those on our list of refugees had moved, we decided to supplement the sample by adding 21 more refugees, including 17 Amerasians who had relocated to Souderton, a suburb of Philadelphia popular with Vietnamese immigrants.

In Washington, D.C., one agency in particular, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), had resettled so many Amerasians, and also had so much more current information on them, that we had to alter our sampling methods—for example, by using neighbors' references—to include more Amerasians resettled by agencies other than IRC. However, even after making such modifications to our original sampling plan, we were still able to adhere to our goal of selecting a diverse sample that included both male and female, and black and white, Amerasians, as well as those who arrived at different times during the period 1988-92 and those resettled by different agencies.

Our literature review showed that the lack of a random sample is the rule rather than the exception in refugee research. We posed this lack of randomness as an issue at a recent international conference on refugee mental health at Harvard University, and conference participants simply acknowledged the reality of this situation. Statistical adjustments would be possible, but the foundation for such adjustments might not be sound. As a result, we primarily report descriptive sample statistics rather than statistically significant indicators such as p values. Validity can also be inferred from whether other data, such as the survey of resettlement workers discussed later in this report, concur with our interview sample.

We compared the 100 Amerasians in our sample with 25 Amerasian half-siblings (not Amerasians) and 30 other Vietnamese (who did not have an Amerasian in the family and who came to the United States under other programs) to control for socioeconomic status and ethnic background, respectively. These comparison subjects matched the Amerasian subjects in terms of age (between 16 and 26), year of arrival (between 1988 and 1992), and first resettlement experience (generally having gone through the same resettlement agencies and moved into the same neighborhoods).

We designed our interviews to obtain each subject's educational history, employment history, and family situation, as well as a number of other factors described previously. However, the interview would have been too long and difficult if conducted by an American with an interpreter. (None

of our subjects was fluent enough in English to complete a whole interview in English without difficulty.) At each of our two sites, we used one primary interviewer who spoke Vietnamese fluently, had at least 1 year of experience in Amerasian resettlement, and was known in the larger Vietnamese community. To enhance the consistency and reliability of the two primary interviewers, we trained them together. In addition, they went out on selected interviews together, alternately interviewing and observing. After the data were collected, we also asked the two interviewers to explain each item in the interview and to make necessary adjustments. We also conducted a number of analyses comparing our two sites and looked for differences in the data collected that might be attributable to interviewer bias.

## Case Studies

We conducted three case studies to develop more information on three particular aspects of resettlement: education, employment, and family relations. The first case study focused on education. To avoid selection bias, we chose all individuals in a particular category—that is, all those in the interview sample who started their education in the United States with vocational training. Vocational training was desired by many Amerasians in our sample as a way of developing the necessary skills for advancement in the United States. We looked at what the Amerasians in our sample studied, whether they finished the program, what they did after completing their studies, what factors (particularly academic and family backgrounds) might explain their outcomes, and how they felt about their experiences.

The second case study focused on employment. Again, to avoid selection bias, we selected all cases in two particular categories: those who have been consistently employed and those who were consistently unemployed during their first 2 years in the United States. For those who were employed, we looked at the types of jobs held, wages, and advances over time. For the unemployed, we tried to find the reasons for their remaining in this category. For both groups, we looked into gender roles, academic and social backgrounds, current family composition, and individual perspectives on what had occurred.

The third case study focused on the more elusive topic of family relationships. Instead of studying a particular category, we selected two individuals and one Amerasian family to study in the greatest possible detail. For all three, we looked at experiences and views; for the family,

we pursued a more elaborate strategy involving data gathering in both Vietnam and the United States.

## Mail Survey of Resettlement Agencies

We conducted a national survey to learn about the various efforts and direct experiences of the local agencies involved in resettling Amerasians in the United States. Officials from these agencies have accumulated a great deal of information after many resettlement cases and thus provided a perspective different from that of the Amerasians themselves. We asked respondents from the resettlement agencies to assess the problems, if any, that Amerasians have faced while resettling in this country, as well as their degree of success in overcoming these problems. We also asked for respondents' observations on what aspects of resettlement have worked well, not so well, or need to be changed.

From lists provided by the Department of State, we identified 164 agencies that resettled Amerasians and their families in 1991 and 1992. We then mailed our questionnaire to all 164 of these agencies. We received 128 responses from them, for an overall response rate of 78 percent. Ten of the respondents, however, indicated that they did not resettle Amerasians in 1991 or 1992. Thus, the information we present in this study is based on responses from 118 agencies and field offices. (The field office data were reported through agencies.)

We performed some nonrespondent analyses on the basis of geographic location and type of resettling agency—that is, according to whether the agency was a cluster site as designated by HHS. Our analyses indicated that nonrespondents did not differ substantially from respondents.

## Officials Interviewed

We interviewed government and nongovernment officials in 25 agencies involved in various aspects of Amerasian resettlement. In the United States, we interviewed officials from HHS, from three offices in the State Department (dealing with admissions, training, and placements), the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the Center for Applied Linguistics, InterAction, and 6 local resettlement agencies (3 in Philadelphia, 1 in Souderton, and 2 in Washington, D.C.). In the Philippines, we interviewed representatives of the United Nations and the Philippine government at the PRPC, the ICMC staff, Community and Family Services International officials, and the director of the transit center in Manila. In Thailand, we interviewed officials of the Orderly Departure Program, and the ICMC staff.

In Vietnam, we interviewed officials and staff from the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Amerasian Transit Center, the Red Cross, and the Orderly Departure Program.

In addition, we also coordinated with the national voluntary resettlement agencies working with InterAction, the local resettlement agencies in Washington, and the Refugee Data Center (RDC).

## Field Observations

We also had the opportunity to talk with many different program officials and Amerasians during our visits to Vietnam and the Philippines. In Vietnam, we observed several interviews of Amerasian families conducted by U.S. officials for the purpose of determining program eligibility. Finally, we spoke with Amerasian families at their homes in the United States, recording both Amerasians' responses and interviewers' observations.

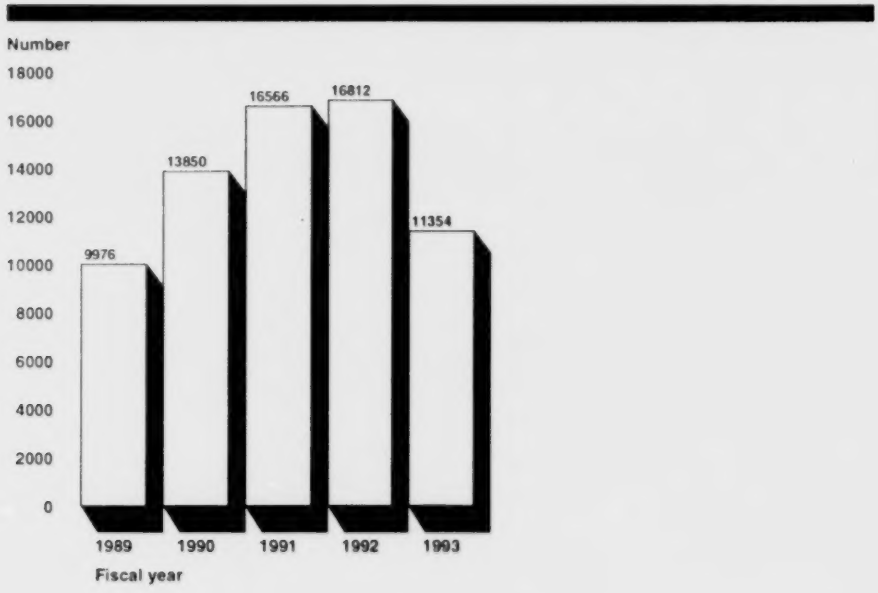
We conducted our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards between May 1992 and May 1993.

# Some Demographic Data

Although the Amerasian Homecoming Act was passed in December 1987, Amerasian resettlement cases did not begin to arrive in this country in large numbers until 1989. The reason for the delay between enactment of the legislation and the time when resettlement cases actually came to the United States was that the process for registering and approving applicants in Vietnam was not implemented until the spring of 1988, and only then were families sent to the Philippines for 6 months of training.

As of August of 1993, 131,814 people had signed up for the resettlement program. Of those, 126,493 were interviewed, 77,577 were approved, 74,879 left Vietnam for the Philippines, and 68,558 arrived in the United States. Except for that in figure II.1, the data in this appendix reflect the situation as of March 1992 and include 47,299 people; of those, 13,060 were Amerasians. Figure II.1 presents the number of arrivals through August of 1993.

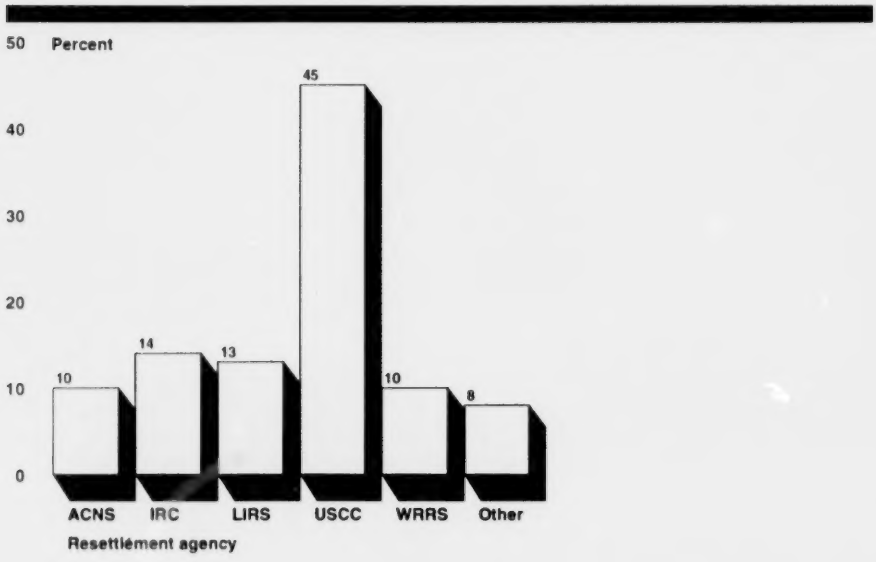
**Figure II.1: Arrivals of Amerasians and Family Members, by Fiscal Year**




Source: Amerasian Update, No. 51 (October 1993), attachment A.

The principal resettlement agencies that sponsored Amerasian cases are depicted in figure II.2. Five resettlement agencies—American Council for Nationalities Service (ACNS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service (LIRS), U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), and World Relief Refugee Service (WRRS)—have resettled over 90 percent of the Amerasian cases, with USCC clearly the agency with the largest caseload of Amerasian families.

**Figure II.2: Resettlement Agencies, by Percent of Sponsored Refugees**



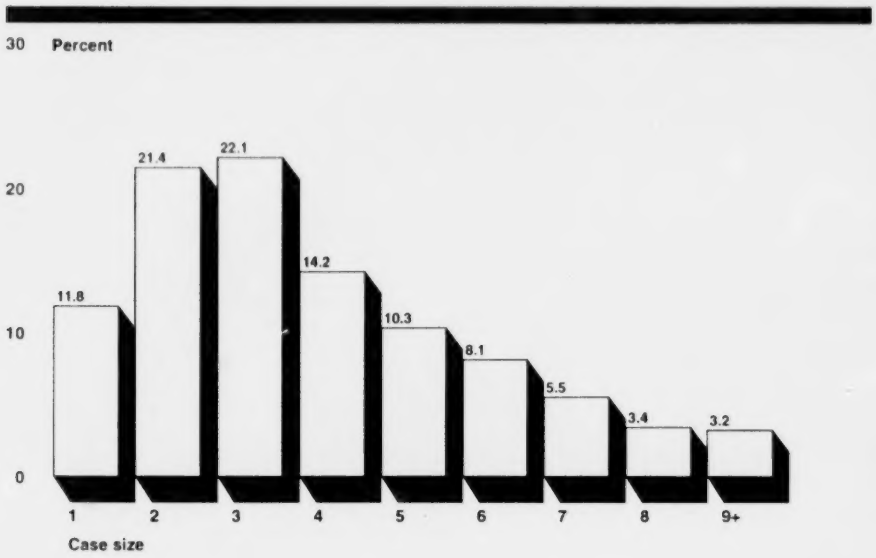

Note: "Other" category includes the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees, Inc.; the Episcopal Migration Ministries; the Hebrew Aid Society; and the Iowa Department of Human Services, Bureau of Refugee Services.

Source: Data furnished by RDC.

The median family size of arriving cases is three. As shown in figure II.3, 12 percent of Amerasians arrived alone, 68 percent arrived with families that totaled 2 to 5 members, and 20 percent arrived in families of 6 or more members. As further illustrated in figure II.4, family members are for the most part parents and siblings. Among Amerasians, 48 percent were women, 16 percent were married, and 14 percent declared themselves

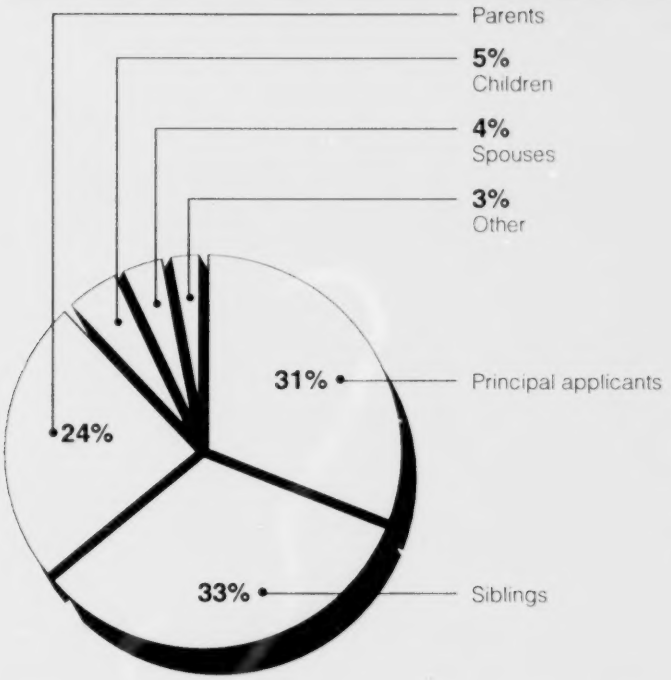
Christians. Seventeen percent were under the age of 18. Fewer than 2 percent were unaccompanied minors to be placed in foster care.

**Figure II.3: Amerasian Case-Size Distribution**




Source: Data furnished by RDC.

Figure II.4: Family Composition of Amerasian Resettlement Cases

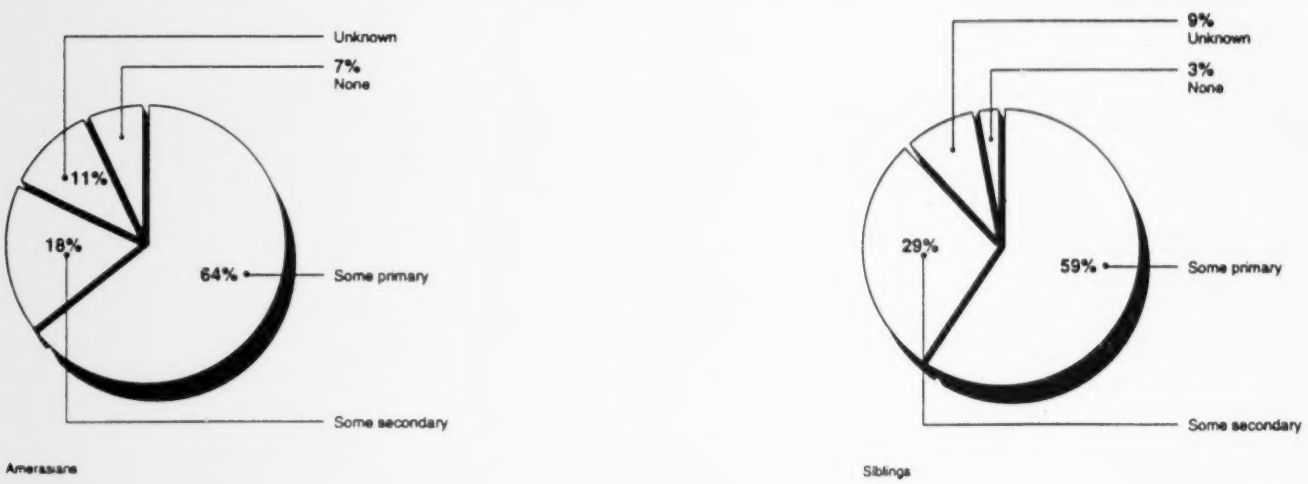



Source: Data furnished by RDC

## Education

Based on self-reporting of education in Vietnam, 7 percent of the Amerasians had not been to any school, 65 percent had completed some primary school, and 18 percent had completed some secondary school. (See figure II.5.) In comparison, siblings of Amerasians tended to have slightly better educational backgrounds, with fewer (3 percent) not having had any schooling and more (29 percent) having completed some secondary school.

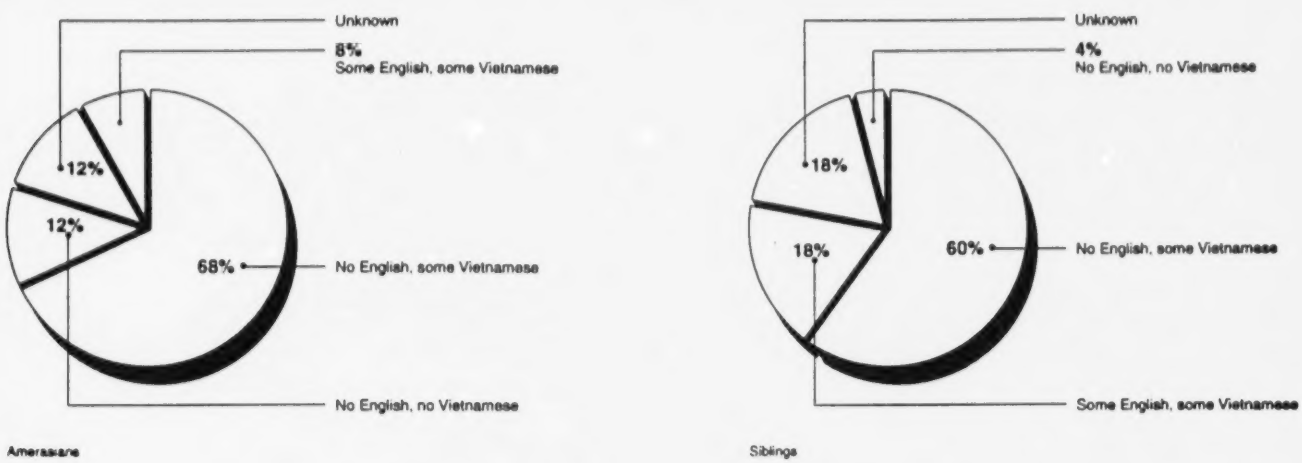
**Figure II.5: Educational Attainment in Vietnam of Amerasians and Siblings**




Source: Data furnished by RDC

When Amerasians were given a brief test for class placement in the PRPC, 11 percent were illiterate in any language including Vietnamese, 69 percent knew Vietnamese but no English, and 8 percent knew some English (though none were fluent enough to assist in classes). In comparison, siblings of Amerasians had slightly better literacy skills: Fewer (4 percent) had no English or Vietnamese literacy and more (18 percent) had some English and Vietnamese literacy. (See figure II.6.)

**Figure II.6: English and Vietnamese Literacy of Amerasians and Siblings**




Note: Levels reflect tests conducted at start of PRPC program. (A special high school preparation program was provided for those aged 13 to 16; however, no literacy test score was available for this age group.)

Source: Data furnished by RDC.

Self-reporting of education in Vietnam and class placement test results in the PRPC agreed fairly closely. For example, those who tested as illiterate either lacked any formal schooling or had only primary schooling. Most of those who had fair English were in either high school or college. When there was a disagreement, it was hard to tell how much of the difference was due to people reporting incorrectly, to the fact that the short test was inaccurate, or to other factors (for example, to schools having different standards or to people receiving schooling at different times). Thus, no statistical adjustment or correction was attempted for self-reporting variables.

## Occupation

With regard to occupation, there were no Amerasians with professional work experience. More than 31 percent of resettled Amerasians did not list any specific occupation, and another 17 percent were younger than 18. The major occupations listed by Amerasians included farmer (12 percent),

benchworker (10 percent), and street vendor (8 percent). Only 28 people, or 0.2 percent, were disabled. (See table III.4.)

## Gender Differences

Women were more likely to be married than men (23 percent versus 10 percent, respectively). Fewer women than men left Vietnam alone (9 percent versus 15 percent). Fewer women tested illiterate (8 percent versus 11 percent), and more women than men reported being in high school (20 percent versus 16 percent). The common occupations among women were tailoring, sales, and domestic and other services; among men, farming and tailoring. There was no difference in terms of religious affiliation.

## Amerasian Interview Sample

Our Amerasian interview sample resembled the previously described total Amerasian population in the United States. (See tables II.1 and II.2.) There were slightly more men than women in our sample, and there were more arrivals in 1990 and 1991 than in previous years. The interview sample included fewer people who arrived in 1992 because our data collection occurred during that year. Only 14 percent of our sample were younger than 18 (compared with a general population rate of 17 percent). The education profiles could not be compared directly because the educational level of 11 percent of the RDC population was unknown.

**Table II.1: Characteristics of Refugee Interview-Sample Groups**

| Characteristic | Group | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Amerasian | Sibling | Other Vietnamese | Total |
| Sex | | | | |
| Male | 54 | 12 | 12 | **78** |
| Female | 46 | 13 | 18 | **77** |
| Year of U.S. arrival | | | | |
| 1989 or earlier | 19 | 4 | 6 | **29** |
| 1990 | 42 | 10 | 7 | **59** |
| 1991 | 31 | 7 | 9 | **47** |
| 1992 | 8 | 4 | 8 | **20** |
| Age at arrival | | | | |
| Up to 17 | 14 | 6 | 3 | **23** |
| 18 | 9 | 4 | 3 | **16** |
| 19 and over | 77 | 15 | 24 | **116** |
| Site | | | | |
| Washington, D.C. | 39 | 5 | 7 | **51** |
| Pennsylvania | 61 | 20 | 23 | **104** |
| Education in Vietnam | | | | |
| 0-2 years | 17 | 1 | 0 | **18** |
| 3-5 years | 31 | 4 | 2 | **37** |
| 6-8 years | 39 | 13 | 8 | **60** |
| 9-12 years | 13 | 5 | 15 | **33** |
| College | 0 | 2 | 5 | **7** |
| **Total** | **100** | **25** | **30** | **155** |

**Table II.2: Sex and Race of Amerasians Interviewed**

| Race | Sex | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| Black | 10 | 9 | **19** |
| White | 44 | 37 | **81** |
| **Total** | **54** | **46** | **100** |

# Education and Training

This section addresses the following questions:

- What education did Amerasians expect to get in the United States?
- What educational opportunities did they have in the United States?
- What was their educational attainment in the United States?
- To what extent did factors such as educational background, gender, and race influence Amerasians' educational achievement in the United States?

## Amerasians' Expectations

Our Amerasian interviewees were asked to recall what kind of education, if any, they expected to receive in the United States, before they left Vietnam. Their most frequent expectation was of some vocational job training (37 percent) and English language training (36 percent). (See table III.1.) Few Amerasians expected to receive college or professional education (8 percent), but more siblings of Amerasians and other Vietnamese did (28 percent and 33 percent, respectively). The other 18 percent of Amerasians expected that they would have little opportunity to learn anything. How old Amerasians were when they arrived in the United States did not seem to influence their expectations. Those who had more education in Vietnam, however, expected more education in the United States. (See table III.2.)

**Table III.1: Expected Highest Level of Education in the United States, by Refugee Group**

| Expected highest level of education in the U.S. | Amerasian | | Sibling | | Other Vietnamese | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| No expectation | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| No opportunity | 18 | 18 | 4 | 16 | 5 | 17 |
| English | 36 | 36 | 7 | 28 | 4 | 13 |
| Vocational | 37 | 37 | 7 | 28 | 11 | 37 |
| Professional | 8 | 8 | 7 | 28 | 10 | 33 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **25** | **100** | **30** | **100** |

Table III.2: Amerasians' Expected Highest Level of Education in the United States, by Educational Level in Vietnam

| | Expected highest level of education in the U.S. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education in Vietnam | No expectation | No opportunity | English | Vocational | Professional |
| 0-2 years | 0 | 4 | 10 | 3 | 0 |
| 3-5 years | 0 | 10 | 7 | 13 | 1 |
| 6-8 years | 1 | 3 | 15 | 16 | 4 |
| 9-12 years | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 3 |

Note: There were 100 Amerasians in our sample.

## Educational Opportunities

The U.S. government's policy with respect to refugees, including Amerasians, has been to encourage the achievement of self-sufficiency as soon as possible after arrival in this country. That is, refugees are advised to find jobs and support themselves unless they are physically unable to do so or are younger than 18 (in which case, they attend high school). (See table III.3.) During the initial 8-month period in which they are eligible to receive government cash assistance, unemployed refugees are encouraged to take English as a Second Language (English) courses. In some cases, attending such courses can be a condition for receiving government cash assistance. (These English language programs differ widely with regard to the quality, level, intensity, and length of instruction.)

Table III.3: Amerasians' Initial Schooling in the United States, by Age at Arrival

| | Age at arrival | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| First school in the U.S. | Up to 17 | 18 | 19 and over |
| No school | 0 | 2 | 24 |
| English | 0 | 2 | 39 |
| High school | 14 | 5 | 6 |
| Vocational school | 0 | 0 | 8 |

Note: There were 100 Amerasians in our sample.

With or without English language skills, some Amerasians are able to enroll in job training centers or other educational programs that are available. Job training programs appear to be particularly important for Amerasians because few have job skills upon arrival in the United States and their educational backgrounds are too weak for more academic programs, such as college-level ones. Some job training programs in the

United States, however, require that students have English language proficiency and certain high school course work completed. These conditions make it difficult for Amerasians to acquire job training. High school, for the most part, becomes less of a viable option as the age of Amerasians arriving in this country increases beyond the age limit (18 years) for enrollment in public schools. Since the Amerasian Homecoming Act program is limited to applicants born during the period 1962-75, the youngest incoming Amerasians as of 1993 were 18 years of age.

## Educational Attainment

### Levels of Education

One method of analysis we employed to study the education of Amerasians is called "state-sequential," a variation of the stage-state analysis.[1] This method involved tracking the different paths people take with regard to education in the United States. That is, after participating in one type of education or training program, an individual may or may not go on to another (for example, from high school to job training or from job training to college).

Different paths in the state-sequential analysis can be combined to find the highest levels of education attained by Amerasians in our sample since their resettlement in this country. (See table 2.) We present educational achievement in the following rank order, from high to low: college, job training program, high school, English language instruction, and no school. Although most of the order is self-evident, job training could be considered higher or lower than high school. A 1-month program, for example, is clearly less than 4 years of high school. On the other hand, a job training program that provides a GED-equivalent education as a first step is probably superior to high school. We generally considered job training to be higher for two reasons. First, some participants in our study graduated from high school before entering a job training program, while none did the reverse. Second, job training programs generally led more directly to employment (and thus to self-sufficiency) than did a high school education, even if the latter were better overall.

[1]See William McKinley Runyan, "A Stage-State Analysis of the Life Course," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38:6 (1980), 951-62.

## Highest Educational Level

Upon arrival in the United States, 25 percent of the Amerasians in our sample entered high schools, 41 percent went to English classes for various lengths of time, and only 8 percent entered job training programs before any other program. No Amerasian in our sample went to college, and another 26 percent never went to any school after resettling in this country.

About one quarter of the 41 Amerasians who attended English language classes continued their education in either vocational training programs or by taking additional English courses; the others had no further training or education. Most English language students acquired some English by the time they stopped going to classes, but virtually none were able to speak English fluently. In fact, most Amerasians in our sample had very limited English proficiency based on our interviewers' judgment, and many continued to rely on resettlement agency personnel and others for translation and literacy assistance. Among the 25 Amerasians in our sample who went to high school, 12 dropped out and only 2 graduated. The few Amerasians who graduated from a U.S. high school did not continue with any further education or training.

Over time, the percentage of Amerasians who attended a job training program increased from 8 percent to 14 percent. Among these Amerasian students, however, there were as many dropouts as there were graduates. Of the 14 Amerasians in our sample who attended a vocational program, 4 graduated, 7 dropped out, and only 3 were still in a program at the time of our interview. Some programs were relatively short and easy, providing courses in sewing or clothing assembly over a 1- to 3-month period, and the participants in our sample who attended these programs graduated. On the other hand, 4 of the 5 participants in our sample who attended a Job Corps program, which provided both English language instruction and job training, dropped out.

## Comparisons

Twenty percent of the other Vietnamese comparison group went to college, and 10 percent went to vocational schools. The main difference, however, was that none of the Vietnamese college or vocational students dropped out. Two factors might explain this difference: The Vietnamese comparison group generally had a better academic background to handle schoolwork, and they also had better social support. More siblings of Amerasians in our samples (44 percent) than Amerasians (23 percent) went to high school because siblings were younger on average.

## General Observations

The Amerasians in our interview samples generally had fragmented or disfunctional families and poor educational backgrounds in Vietnam. In the United States, both of these disadvantages continued to impede their progress. The immigration process fragmented some families still further because not all family members were able or willing to resettle in the United States. The language barrier further handicapped these Amerasians. As a result, few of them were able to take advantage of educational opportunities in this country, while some of their other Vietnamese counterparts who had both family support and better educational backgrounds gradually began to excel and continued their education in college programs.

## Educational Background in Vietnam

To determine whether the U.S. educational achievement of the Amerasians, siblings of Amerasians, and other Vietnamese in our interview samples was influenced by their educational background in Vietnam, we divided our samples into those who came to the United States with less than a sixth grade education and those who had more education than this.

Among Amerasians, the number with less than a sixth grade education almost matched the number with more, yielding odds of 0.92 (where 1.0 indicates the same odds for each group). A much greater proportion of siblings and other Vietnamese than Amerasians had more than a sixth grade education. For Amerasians, the odds of having a low level of education was about 4 times that of siblings and 13 times that of other Vietnamese. A low level of education was particularly common among black Amerasians in our samples, who were 11 times more likely than their siblings and 39 times more likely than other Vietnamese to have this low educational level. (See table III.4.)

**Table III.4: Odds of Having a Low Level of Education in Vietnam, by Refugee Group**

| Educational factor | Amerasian | | | Sibling | Other Vietnamese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Black | White | Total | | |
| Number with low level of education (0-5th grade) | 14 | 34 | 48 | 5 | 2 |
| Number with high level of education (6th grade up) | 5 | 47 | 52 | 20 | 28 |
| Odds of having low level of education[a] | 2.80 | 0.72 | .92 | 0.25 | 0.07 |
| Odds ratio | | | | | |
| To other Vietnamese[b] | 39 | 10 | 13 | 4 | 1 |
| To siblings[c] | 11 | 3 | 4 | 1 | .28 |

[a]Equals the ratio of "number with low level of education" to "number with high level of education."

[b]Equals the ratio of "odds of having a low level of education" to 0.07, which is the odds of having a low level of education for other Vietnamese.

[c]Equals the ratio of "odds of having a low level of education" to 0.25, which is the odds of having a low level of education for siblings.

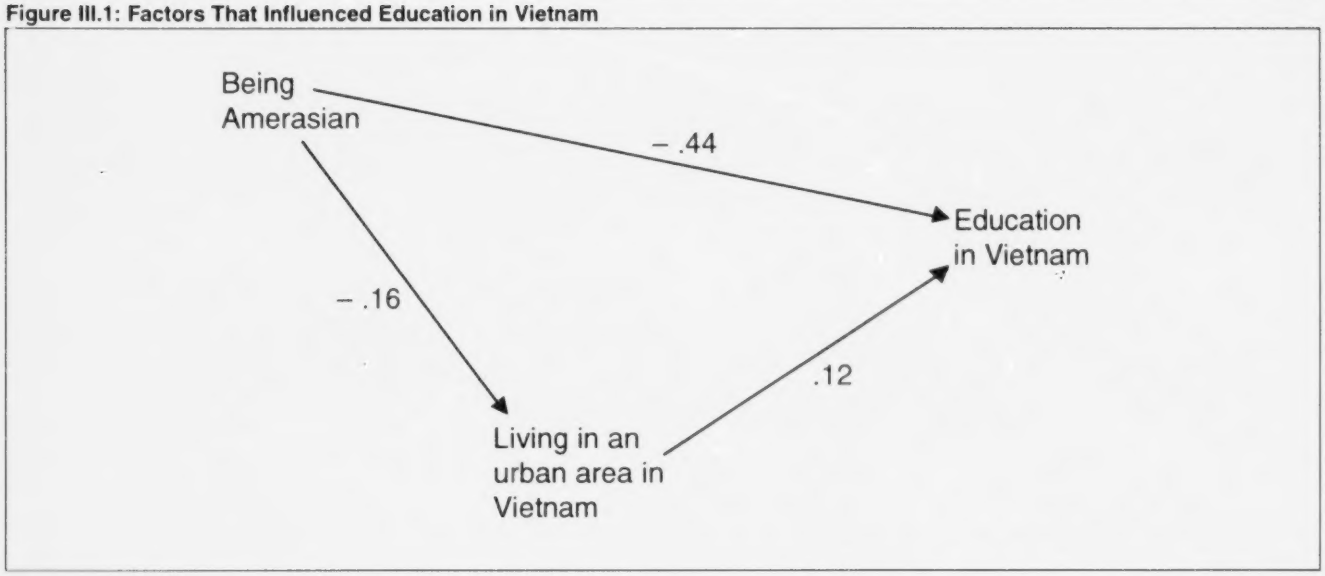
One factor that may have influenced educational background was whether the Vietnamese hometown area was rural or urban. Some observers have pointed out that the public education system in Vietnam is more developed in the urban than in the rural areas of the country. Forty-two percent of the black Amerasians in our samples grew up in rural areas, compared with 31 percent of the white Amerasians, 20 percent of the siblings, and 17 percent of the other Vietnamese. However, even after controlling for hometown location, the order of educational level (from low to high) was still black Amerasians, white Amerasians, siblings of Amerasians, and other Vietnamese. (See table III.5.) Gender did not influence level of education in Vietnam.

**Table III.5: Highest Educational Level in Vietnam of Different Refugee Groups, by Rural or Urban Hometown**

| Education in Vietnam | Amerasian | | Sibling | Other Vietnamese |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Black | White | | |
| Rural hometown | | | | |
| 0 to 2nd grade | 21% | 4% | 0% | 0% |
| 3rd to 5th grade | 11 | 11 | 8 | 0 |
| 6th to 8th grade | 5 | 15 | 8 | 7 |
| 9th to 12th grade | 5 | 1 | 4 | 10 |
| Some college | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **42%** | **31%** | **20%** | **17%** |
| Urban hometown | | | | |
| 0 to 2nd grade | 16 | 9 | 4 | 0 |
| 3rd to 5th grade | 26 | 19 | 8 | 7 |
| 6th to 8th grade | 16 | 28 | 44 | 20 |
| 9th to 12th grade | 0 | 14 | 16 | 40 |
| Some college | 0 | 0 | 8 | 17 |
| **Total** | **58%** | **69%** | **80%** | **83%** |

Another way to look at the influence that race and hometown location may have had on education in Vietnam is presented in figure III.1. To simplify the analysis, the two comparison groups were combined, and rural hometown was coded 1, urban 2. Paths in figure III.1 indicate that being an Amerasian had a strong direct negative influence on Vietnamese education, in addition to a small indirect negative influence through hometown location.

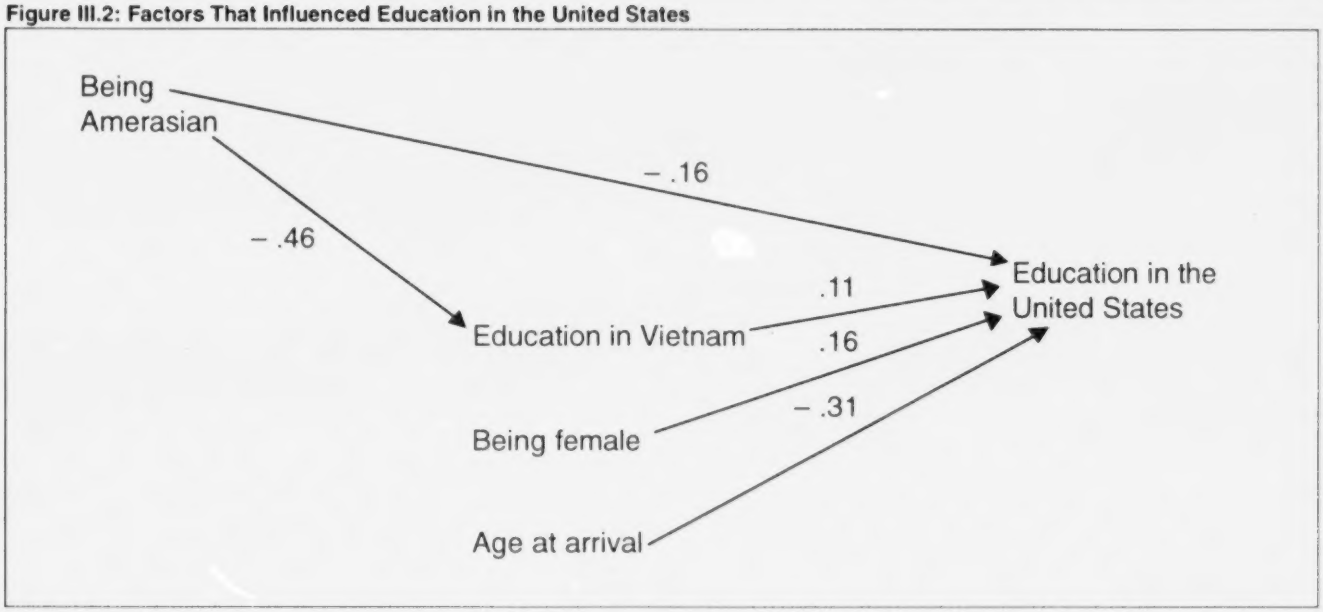
**Figure III.1: Factors That Influenced Education in Vietnam**




## Current Influence

Do Vietnamese hometown location, educational background, and group membership influence educational achievement in the United States? In our analysis, gender was coded 2 for women and 1 for men. American education was coded from low to high as follows: (1) no schooling, (2) English only, (3) high school, (4) job training, and (5) college. Since going to high school or not was determined almost solely by age, high school students were omitted from the following analysis. A path analysis showed that U.S. educational achievement was somewhat influenced by group membership, education in Vietnam, age at arrival (younger people had an advantage), and gender (women had an advantage). The group or race factor probably reflects the fragmented and disfunctional state of Amerasian families in general. (See figure III.2.)

Figure III.2: Factors That Influenced Education in the United States




## Observations of the Resettlement Agencies

Our survey of resettlement agencies also clearly showed that Amerasians have faced educational difficulties in the United States. We asked resettlement agency officials to identify the most significant problems that Amerasians in general experienced in this country. Respondents listed low educational level, few or no job skills, and lack of English skills as the three most important problems for Amerasians. The percentages of Amerasians who experienced these problems according to the agencies were 82, 75, and 72 percent, respectively, as compared with 35, 45, and 48 percent, respectively, among other Vietnamese whom the agencies have helped to resettle. Not surprisingly, respondents also indicated that, with regard to services that Amerasians should be receiving, increased educational and vocational training were viewed as most important.

## U.S. Education Compared With Prior Expectations

Did the actual educational experience in the United States of the Amerasians in our interview samples match their stated expectations? About half of those who indicated that they expected to learn English had taken only an English course and had received no other education; most of those who expected difficulties experienced them and took no educational courses in the United States. (See table III.6.) None of those who expected professional training went to college, only 14 percent received any form of

job training, and only 28 percent (8 of 37) of those who expected vocational training entered such a program. Furthermore, only 1 percent (one individual) had graduated from vocational training and was employed in the field of his training. This figure is far from the 37 percent who expected successful vocational training.

**Table III.6: Amerasians' Expected and Actual Highest Level of Education in the United States**

| | Highest level of education in the U.S. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expected highest level of education in the U.S. | None | English | High school | Vocational school | Total |
| No expectation | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | **1** |
| No opportunity | 11 | 3 | 3 | 1 | **18** |
| English | 8 | 20 | 4 | 4 | **36** |
| Vocational | 6 | 13 | 10 | 8 | **37** |
| Professional | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | **8** |
| **Total** | **26** | **37** | **23** | **14** | **100** |

## Conclusion

There are two questions that arise from these findings: Are there opportunities for those who want to succeed, and can those who take advantage of the opportunities succeed? Our analysis indicated that there were some opportunities, though not enough, as demonstrated by the gap between the 37 percent who anticipated job training and the 14 percent who actually received any form of it. Programs might have been available, but many of those Amerasians in our interview samples who emigrated on their own felt that they needed to contribute monetarily to their poor families in Vietnam before they could take time to advance themselves.

Equally important is the fact that those Amerasians in our samples who went to school generally did not finish, probably for two reasons: (1) lack of preparatory training and (2) lack of motivation and endurance. As a result, only one individual had graduated and used his training. There were some programs aimed at alleviating the educational deficit, but they had been discontinued due to a lack of funding. Motivation and endurance were strongly reinforced by a well-functioning family, which the Amerasians in our sample often lacked. The influence of both factors, fragmented families and poor education, were intensified in the United States. Given these handicaps, the Amerasians in our sample could not take advantage of U.S. higher education and had severe difficulties with the more comprehensive job training programs. For those Amerasians in our interview sample, limited training did not prove fruitful.

We also asked our Amerasian respondents open-ended questions about their plans for the future, over the next 1, 3, and 10 years. The majority expected that in a year they would return to school to learn job skills or English, and that such education would enhance their employment opportunities. Some also expected that they would be able to enroll in educational programs in 3 years. (See table III.7.) However, in reality, few Amerasians in our samples have gone back to school.

**Table III.7: Future Educational Plans, by Refugee Group**

| | Group | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plan to return to school | Amerasian[a] | Sibling[b] | Other Vietnamese[c] |
| In 1 year | 57% | 100% | 55% |
| In 3 years | 30 | 36 | 40 |
| In 10 years | 2 | 0 | 0 |

[a]Number = 100.

[b]Number = 25.

[c]Number = 30.

# Employment and Assistance

This appendix addresses the following questions:

- What has been the U.S. government's policy toward the employment of Amerasians?
- What expectations did they have of employment and material comfort in the United States as compared with Vietnam?
- What help did the Amerasians receive and what difficulties did they encounter in looking for employment?
- What was the Amerasians' employment status in the United States?
- To what extent did factors such as educational background and family composition influence their employment in the United States?

The employment situations of the Amerasians and the refugee comparison groups—that is, siblings of Amerasians, and other Vietnamese—were similar, so most of our results include all refugees in our interview sample. However, when the Amerasians differed from the comparison groups, these differences are pointed out.

## Amerasians' Expectations of Employment and Material Comfort

When they were in Vietnam, the majority (58 percent) of Amerasians we interviewed expected that jobs would be easy to find in the United States, and almost all (93 percent) expected that their material comfort would be "adequate" or better in the United States. (See table IV.1.)

Table IV.1: Expectations of Job Opportunities and Material Comfort in Vietnam and the United States, by Refugee Group

| | Group | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Expectation | Amerasian[a] | Sibling[b] | Other Vietnamese[c] |
| Job opportunities in Vietnam | | | |
| No expectation | 4% | 8% | 0% |
| Hard to find | 34 | 36 | 10 |
| Easy to find | 23 | 28 | 47 |
| Family business | 39 | 28 | 43 |
| Material comfort in Vietnam | | | |
| No expectation | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Poor | 32 | 28 | 13 |
| Less than adequate | 20 | 32 | 23 |
| Adequate | 39 | 40 | 57 |
| Comfortable | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| Wealthy | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Job opportunities in the U.S. | | | |
| No expectation | 7 | 8 | 0 |
| Hard to find | 35 | 44 | 37 |
| Easy to find | 58 | 48 | 63 |
| Material comfort in the U.S. | | | |
| No expectation | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Poor | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Less than adequate | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| Adequate | 66 | 80 | 37 |
| Comfortable | 21 | 12 | 43 |
| Wealthy | 6 | 0 | 17 |

[a]Number = 100.

[b]Number = 25.

[c]Number = 30.

In Vietnam, the family played an important job role. About 39 percent of our interviewed Amerasians would have expected to work in a family business had they stayed in Vietnam, so they would have had no need to find jobs. Whether they found employment in a family business or elsewhere, more than half expected that their material comfort would have been less than adequate in Vietnam. (See table IV.2.)

Table IV.2: Amerasians' Expectations of Material Comfort in Vietnam, by Employment Expectation.

| | Expected job opportunities in Vietnam | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expected material comfort in Vietnam | No expectation | Hard to find | Easy to find | Family business | Total |
| No expectation | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | **4** |
| Poor | 0 | 11 | 4 | 17 | **32** |
| Less than adequate | 0 | 9 | 6 | 5 | **20** |
| Adequate | 3 | 12 | 10 | 14 | **39** |
| Comfortable | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | **3** |
| Wealthy | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | **2** |
| **Total** | **4** | **34** | **23** | **39** | **100** |

# Employment Opportunities

## Employment and Assistance

The official U.S. policy in recent years has been to get refugees employed as soon as possible. Early employment is viewed as having several advantages: It makes people contributors instead of burdens on the government, helps to increase their own self-esteem, and allows them to learn English and other skills on the job. On the other hand, some resettlement experts argue that early employment, especially for those with little education and few job skills, locks the best adjusted refugees into low-paying jobs that provide very little in the way of job skill development or advancement, and relegates the poorly adjusted refugees to government assistance such as AFDC or, even worse, to gang involvement and homelessness for those without a safety net. These experts advocate a greater investment in education before early employment, arguing that it can lead to greater success in the long term.

The State Department requires resettlement agencies to report the status of refugees, including whether they are employed or in training and whether they have been referred to social service providers, 90 days after their arrival in the United States. Agencies are eligible for special matching grants to give refugees more time to locate work and to stay off the regular welfare cash assistance programs. In addition to resettlement agencies, there are contract job developers that locate jobs for refugees.

Upon arrival in the United States, refugees qualify for government cash and medical assistance, as well as for other types of assistance from the

resettlement agencies. Agencies receive a cash stipend from the Department of State to cover the initial resettlement costs for each refugee family member. Agencies use these funds to provide assistance in different ways. With respect to housing, some agencies own apartments and provide them directly to newly arriving families, while other agencies rent housing units for refugee families. In addition, resettlement agencies provide some household furnishings to families, such as mattresses and cooking utensils that agencies buy or receive from donors. Refugees further receive a small amount of cash (with the exact amount depending on the particular resettlement agency and the location) for such items as food and bus fare to go to English language classes. If there is no immediate job prospect, refugees are helped to apply for government cash assistance until they secure a job or reach the maximum assistance limit, whichever comes first. The maximum limit for this assistance during 1992 was 8 months.

### Educational Assistance

Those refugees who are too old to attend high school are encouraged to find employment. One reason advanced for this policy is that it would be unfair for refugees to get cash assistance while they attend college when American citizens cannot do so. One official argued that, if refugees want to go to college, they should rely on regular financial aid programs rather than on refugee cash assistance. However, college financial aid normally has to be applied for well in advance, and thus, in their first year of college, those refugees who had recently arrived in the United States would have to pay the higher out-of-state tuition rate. Some job training programs, on the other hand, are provided at no cost, and some pay students a small stipend on which to live. However, few Amerasians have entered such job training programs, as we show in appendix III.

## Employment Status

We looked at employment status from a number of angles. First, how long was the period from the time of arrival to initial employment? Second, was the year of arrival related to the ability of the refugees to obtain a job? Third, what other factors—such as site, gender, and group—influenced employment, and to what extent? One of our main findings was that single mothers accounted for the majority of those unemployed, and that Amerasians had a much higher proportion of single mothers than the comparison groups.

### Employment Status at Different Intervals

Using a short-term, stage-state type of analysis, we asked what our subjects were doing at four different checkpoints after their arrival in the

United States: 2 months, 8 months, 1 year, and 2 years. We asked whether they worked, received assistance, went to school, or relied on family and friends for support. We wanted to include individuals from different refugee cohorts in our sample, so we did not restrict our sample to those who had been in the United States for at least 2 years. Thus, the numbers of people at later checkpoints are smaller than at earlier ones. Table IV.3 presents the number of working and nonworking people at each checkpoint. (Students, including all of those in high school, have been excluded.)

Table IV.3: Work Status in the United States at Four Checkpoints, by Refugee Group

| | Amerasian | | Sibling | | Other Vietnamese | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work status at checkpoint | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 2 months | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 53 | 76 | 9 | 69 | 9 | 56 | 71 | 72 |
| Working | 17 | 24 | 4 | 31 | 7 | 44 | 28 | 28 |
| **Total** | **70** | **100** | **13** | **100** | **16** | **100** | **99** | **100** |
| 8 months | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 23 | 35 | 3 | 27 | 2 | 18 | 28 | 32 |
| Working | 43 | 65 | 8 | 73 | 9 | 82 | 60 | 68 |
| **Total** | **66** | **100** | **11** | **100** | **6** | **100** | **88** | **100** |
| 1 year | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 16 | 26 | 4 | 36 | 1 | 17 | 21 | 27 |
| Working | 45 | 74 | 7 | 64 | 5 | 83 | 57 | 73 |
| **Total** | **61** | **100** | **11** | **100** | **6** | **100** | **78** | **100** |
| 2 years | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 11 | 31 | 3 | 33 | 2 | 40 | 16 | 33 |
| Working | 24 | 69 | 6 | 67 | 3 | 60 | 33 | 67 |
| **Total** | **35** | **100** | **9** | **100** | **5** | **100** | **49** | **100** |

Note: Students, including all of those in high school, have been excluded.

The employment rate among interviewed Amerasians increased from 24 percent at 2 months to 65 percent at 8 months, to 74 percent at 1 year, and finally to 69 percent at 2 years. Thus, the employment rate started to stabilize somewhere between the second and the eighth month. (One resettlement worker in our resettlement agency survey stated that employment status was basically determined by the third month after arrival in the United States.)

## Types of Employment

Generally, the respondents in our interview sample who were employed tended to have low-paying, entry-level jobs. These jobs covered a broad spectrum, such as assembly line work in factories, housekeeping work in the hotel industry, dishwashing in restaurants, and other service-sector work. The respondents reported learning some skills on the job; however, they were offered little formal training.

Refugees in our sample reported no promotions, although their salaries had increased over the course of time. The average starting hourly wage for a first job was $5.71, and the current or end wage of a first job was $6.54. The increase appears small because some respondents had not been employed long. For those refugees who had worked for 2 years or more, the wage increase was larger.

## Gender

There was a wide gender gap in our interview sample with regard to employment. Amerasian men's employment rate increased steadily from 37 percent at 2 months to 72 percent at 8 months, and to 85 percent at the 1- and 2-year points—compared with Amerasian women's rates at corresponding checkpoints of 9, 57, 59, and 47 percent. (See table IV.4.) One important gender difference was that 24 women (versus only 11 men) had children, and child care considerations may have deterred some women from seeking work.

**Table IV.4: Amerasians' Work Status in the United States at Four Checkpoints, by Gender**

| | Male | | Female | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Work status at checkpoint** | **Number** | **Percent** | **Number** | **Percent** |
| 2 months | | | | |
| Not working | 24 | 63 | 29 | 91 |
| Working | 14 | 37 | 3 | 9 |
| 8 months | | | | |
| Not working | 10 | 26 | 13 | 43 |
| Working | 26 | 72 | 17 | 57 |
| 1 year | | | | |
| Not working | 5 | 15 | 11 | 41 |
| Working | 29 | 85 | 16 | 59 |
| 2 years | | | | |
| Not working | 3 | 15 | 8 | 53 |
| Working | 17 | 85 | 7 | 47 |

## Year of Arrival and Employment

Given that the Amerasians who were employed tended to find jobs relatively soon after arrival in the United States (between the second and eighth month), we attempted to determine whether cohort differences (based on time of arrival in the United States) were apparent. Those Amerasians who arrived earlier naturally were younger. (The correlation between Amerasians' year of arrival and age at arrival is 0.53.) Those Amerasians who arrived at the age of 18 or younger were enrolled in school, and thus were not employed (and we therefore excluded these individuals from our analysis of employment status). Although some resettlement agency officials have speculated that more recently arrived Amerasians were more disadvantaged because they more often came from rural areas in Vietnam and thus had less education and fewer resources (which in turn could adversely influence employment), we did not find a relationship between arrival year and education in Vietnam ($r = -0.09$; $p = 0.35$).

Actually, there is partial evidence that the employment rate was higher within the more recently arrived cohorts, with the exception of those refugees who had been here less than 8 months and thus had not yet found employment. As shown in table IV.5, 9 out of 15 (60 percent) of those refugees who had arrived in the United States in 1989 were not employed at the time when we interviewed them, as compared with 15 of 36 (42 percent) and 8 of 30 (27 percent) not employed among those who arrived in 1990 and 1991. One factor that may account for this difference was the decline in the number of months Refugee Cash Assistance was available, which increased pressure on refugees to find employment early.

Table IV.5: Amerasians' Work Status at Different Checkpoints, by Year of U.S. Arrival

| | Year of U.S. arrival | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work status at checkpoint | 1989 or earlier | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | Total |
| 2 months | | | | | |
| Not working | 13 | 28 | 26 | 5 | **72** |
| Working | 2 | 8 | 4 | 3 | **17** |
| **Total** | **15** | **36** | **30** | **8** | **89** |
| 8 months | | | | | |
| Not working | 12 | 17 | 10 | 2 | **41** |
| Working | 3 | 19 | 20 | 2 | **44** |
| **Total** | **15** | **36** | **30** | **4** | **85** |
| 1 year | | | | | |
| Not working | 10 | 14 | 5 | | **29** |
| Working | 5 | 22 | 23 | | **50** |
| **Total** | **15** | **36** | **28** | | **79** |
| 2 years | | | | | |
| Not working | 9 | 13 | 1 | | **23** |
| Working | 6 | 20 | 1 | | **27** |
| **Total** | **15** | **33** | **2** | | **50** |
| Present work status | | | | | |
| Not working | 9 | 15 | 8 | 4 | **36** |
| Working | 6 | 21 | 22 | 4 | **53** |
| **Total** | **15** | **36** | **30** | **8** | **89** |

Note: Current high school students were excluded.

## Year of Arrival, Family Composition, and Employment

Another factor affecting work status that is concurrent with employment status and probably stronger is the family composition of Amerasians. The earlier Amerasian women came to the United States, and the longer they lived here, the more likely they were to be single mothers. The percentage of single mothers increased from 38 to 47 and then to 67 percent for those women who arrived in 1991, 1990, and 1989 or earlier. Up to 48 percent of Amerasian women were on Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), compared with 23 percent of siblings and only 6 percent of other Vietnamese. The rate of Amerasian women receiving AFDC in 1992 increased with their length of residence in the United States. Their overall rate of AFDC reception in 1992 was 22 of 46, as compared with 3 of 13 among siblings and only 1 of 18 among other Vietnamese. (See table IV.6.)

**Table IV.6: Number of Amerasian Women Receiving AFDC in 1992, by Year of U.S. Arrival**

| | Year of U.S. arrival | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Receiving AFDC in 1992 | 1989 or earlier | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | Total |
| No | 4 | 8 | 8 | 3 | **24** |
| Yes | 8 | 9 | 5 | 1 | **22** |
| **Total** | **12** | **17** | **13** | **4** | **46** |

## Education and Employment

Most initial jobs for Amerasians did not require English language skills (80 percent), education (87 percent), or prior work experience (81 percent). (See table IV.7.) As a result, refugees with less education were not necessarily at a disadvantage. (See table IV.8.)

**Table IV.7: Requirements for First Jobs Secured by Refugees**

| | Amerasian | | Sibling | | Other Vietnamese | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| First job required | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| English | | | | | | | | |
| No | 41 | 80 | 9 | 90 | 9 | 69 | 59 | 80 |
| Yes | 10 | 20 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 31 | 15 | 20 |
| Experience | | | | | | | | |
| No | 39 | 81 | 8 | 80 | 3 | 33 | 50 | 75 |
| Yes | 9 | 19 | 2 | 20 | 6 | 67 | 17 | 25 |
| Education | | | | | | | | |
| No | 40 | 87 | 10 | 100 | 8 | 89 | 58 | 89 |
| Yes | 6 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 7 | 11 |

Table IV.8: Amerasians' Work Status, by Vietnamese Educational Background

| Work status at checkpoint | Education in Vietnam | |
|---|---|---|
| | 0 to 5th grade | 6th grade up |
| 2 months | | |
| Not working | 36 | 36 |
| Working | 7 | 10 |
| 8 months | | |
| Not working | 20 | 21 |
| Working | 21 | 23 |
| 1 year | | |
| Not working | 17 | 12 |
| Working | 19 | 31 |
| 2 years | | |
| Not working | 12 | 11 |
| Working | 13 | 14 |
| Present work status | | |
| Not working | 21 | 15 |
| Working | 22 | 31 |

Note: Current high school students were excluded.

## Race and Group

When all interviewees were included in the analysis, black Amerasians consistently had the highest employment rate at all checkpoints. (See table IV.9.) The two comparison groups—siblings and other Vietnamese—had lower employment rates. However, when students were excluded (as in table IV.3), the rates of all groups were comparable. We used a fairly strict definition of student—namely, that the individual must have been in the United States for at least 8 months and must have been in school at all of the possible checkpoints—that is, if an individual had been in the country for less than 1 year, then the 1-year and 2-year checkpoints were not possible. Many of the students were still in high school. A number of the "other Vietnamese" students were attending college and thus potentially had the best long-term employment prospects.

Table IV.9: Work Status, by Refugee Group

| | Black Amerasian | | White Amerasian | | Sibling | | Other Vietnamese | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Work status at checkpoint | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 2 months | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 14 | 74 | 69 | 85 | 20 | 80 | 23 | 77 |
| Working | 5 | 26 | 12 | 15 | 5 | 20 | 7 | 23 |
| 8 months | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 6 | 33 | 45 | 58 | 13 | 59 | 12 | 50 |
| Working | 12 | 67 | 33 | 42 | 9 | 41 | 12 | 50 |
| 1 year | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 5 | 29 | 32 | 44 | 14 | 67 | 10 | 59 |
| Working | 12 | 71 | 40 | 56 | 7 | 33 | 7 | 41 |
| 2 years | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 4 | 40 | 27 | 54 | 7 | 50 | 9 | 69 |
| Working | 6 | 60 | 23 | 46 | 7 | 50 | 4 | 31 |
| Present work status | | | | | | | | |
| Not working | 8 | 42 | 36 | 44 | 16 | 64 | 17 | 57 |
| Working | 11 | 58 | 45 | 56 | 9 | 36 | 13 | 43 |

## Site

Philadelphia has had a low employment rate compared with Washington, D.C., in recent years. In fact, in 1991, the State Department discouraged the national resettlement agencies from sending refugees to Philadelphia because of the high unemployment rate among refugees there. Among the refugees in our sample, those living in Philadelphia had lower employment rates at the three later checkpoints (8 months, 1 year, and 2 years after arrival) than those living in Washington, D.C., and Souderton, Pennsylvania. (See table IV.10.) However, when students were excluded, the results were somewhat different, with Philadelphia still having a lower refugee employment rate at the 8-month and 1-year checkpoints but a slightly higher rate at the 2-year point than that for Washington, D.C. (See table IV.11.)

Table IV.10: Work Status, by Refugee's City of Residence

| Work status at checkpoint | Washington, D.C. | | Souderton, Pa. | | Philadelphia, Pa. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 2 months | | | | | | |
| Not working | 49 | 96 | 15 | 71 | 62 | 75 |
| Working | 2 | 4 | 6 | 29 | 21 | 25 |
| 8 months | | | | | | |
| Not working | 20 | 40 | 9 | 45 | 47 | 65 |
| Working | 30 | 60 | 11 | 55 | 25 | 35 |
| 1 year | | | | | | |
| Not working | 16 | 35 | 6 | 32 | 39 | 63 |
| Working | 30 | 65 | 13 | 68 | 23 | 37 |
| 2 years | | | | | | |
| Not working | 10 | 45 | 6 | 40 | 31 | 62 |
| Working | 12 | 55 | 9 | 60 | 19 | 38 |
| Present work status | | | | | | |
| Not working | 20 | 39 | 8 | 38 | 49 | 59 |
| Working | 31 | 61 | 13 | 62 | 34 | 41 |

Note: Includes all three interview samples

**Table IV.11: Work Status by Refugee's City of Residence, After All Students Were Excluded**

| Work status at checkpoint | Washington, D.C. | | Souderton, Pa. | | Philadelphia, Pa. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| 2 months | | | | | | |
| Not working | 42 | 95 | 10 | 63 | 29 | 59 |
| Working | 2 | 5 | 6 | 38 | 20 | 41 |
| 8 months | | | | | | |
| Not working | 16 | 37 | 4 | 27 | 16 | 41 |
| Working | 27 | 63 | 11 | 73 | 23 | 59 |
| 1 year | | | | | | |
| Not working | 12 | 30 | 2 | 14 | 13 | 39 |
| Working | 28 | 70 | 12 | 86 | 20 | 61 |
| 2 years | | | | | | |
| Not working | 8 | 42 | 2 | 20 | 10 | 37 |
| Working | 11 | 58 | 8 | 80 | 17 | 63 |
| Present work status | | | | | | |
| Not working | 16 | 36 | 4 | 25 | 20 | 41 |
| Working | 28 | 64 | 12 | 75 | 29 | 59 |

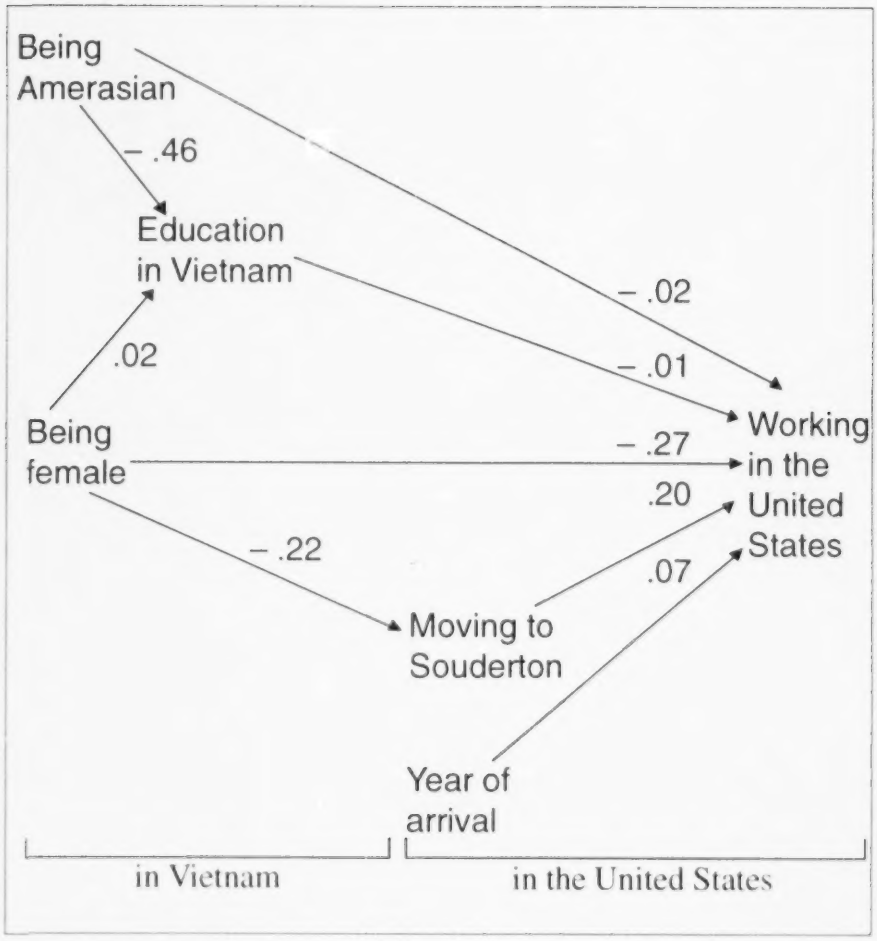
Note: Includes all three interview samples; all students (including all high school students) were excluded.

Souderton, a suburb of Philadelphia, was a special case because most refugees were not initially resettled there; instead, they went there later to seek employment. Furthermore, even though Washington, D.C., had the same employment ratio as the other sites, it was still doing relatively better in view of the high ratio of women among its refugees (59 percent), since women in our samples had a lower overall employment rate.

## Path Analysis: a Summary of Factors Influencing Employment

An overall work score was constructed by adding the work scores (1 = working; 0 = not working) at the first three checking points. High school students were excluded from the analysis. Though Amerasians had a distinct disadvantage in education in Vietnam, they did not lag behind in U.S. employment. Women had lower work scores and also were less likely to move to better worksites, such as Souderton. (See figure IV.1.) Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia were not very different in work scores after adjusting for high school students.

Figure IV.1: Factors Affecting Work Status in the United States

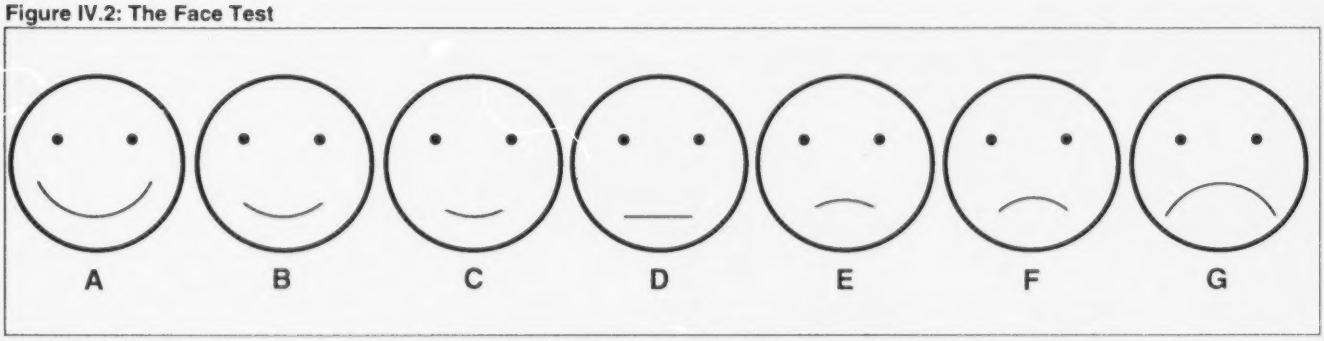



In summary, more men than women worked, and those refugees who moved to better work sites had a higher rate of employment. Probably just as important was the large effect of extraneous variables (0.93) which probably means that most people worked at a wide array of entry-level jobs (so no factor made much difference). Another factor of concern was that employment rates among women decreased after the first year, mainly due to the effect of single motherhood.

## Work and Satisfaction

Are working Amerasians happier than nonworking ones according to the previously set forth hypothesis of self-sufficiency? Since happiness is an elusive but important construct, we used several measures to characterize it, as well as asked interviewees to report whether they were happy and why, using a simple face scale. (See figure IV.2.) They were also asked whether they preferred the United States or Vietnam, and whether they were satisfied with leaving Vietnam and coming to the United States. Finally, our interviewees also took a depression test (using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies' Depression Scale) and a self-esteem test.

**Figure IV.2: The Face Test**




Note: The faces express various feelings. Below each is a letter. The Amerasian was asked to choose the face that came closest to expressing his or her feelings about his or her life in Vietnam, in the PRPC, and in the United States.

Source: F.M. Andrews and S.B. Withey, Social Indicators of Well-Being: Americans' Perceptions of Life Quality (New York: Plenum, 1976).

The analysis was restricted to people not currently in high school. There seemed to be no difference in happiness or preference for the United States between those who were working and those who were not, except for a low but significant correlation ($r = 0.23$; $p = 0.02$) between working status and low depression. There was no correlation between work and self-esteem.

## Resettlement Agencies' Report on Employment

Although resettlement agency respondents in our survey identified "few or no job skills" as one of the three most important problems that Amerasians face (reporting that 75 percent of Amerasians experienced this problem), they did not consider lack of job opportunities to be as serious a problem

for Amerasians (reporting that 29 percent of Amerasians experienced this problem).

Agency respondents also indicated that Amerasians have been fairly successful in gaining employment. We first asked agency respondents to estimate the percentage of all the Amerasians they had resettled in the past 2 years whom they knew well enough to assess in terms of self-sufficiency. Respondents reported that they knew approximately two thirds of the Amerasians they had resettled well enough to assess their self-sufficiency status. We then asked respondents to estimate the percentage of these Amerasians who were employed (either full- or part-time) or on public assistance after 1 and 2 years in the United States. Agency officials indicated that 76 percent and 81 percent, respectively, of the Amerasians were employed after 1 and 2 years in this country. However, most of those who were employed had jobs with low skill requirements; relatively few (5 percent in 1991 and 8 percent in 1992) had semiprofessional jobs or better.

## Conclusion

Lack of education did not hinder refugees from securing entry-level jobs requiring no English, education, or experience. Most refugees in our interview sample planned to go to school during the next several years; however, in reality, most working people did not go back to school and thus did not climb beyond the entry level. Salary increased over time for persistent workers. The employment rate also increased among the more recently arrived.

In Vietnam, the family was a primary job provider. In the United States, children in single-mother families were a primary barrier to employment. Amerasian women were much more likely than their peers to enter into the single-mother status, in this way resembling their own mothers. (See appendix VI on the family.)

# Housing and Health Care in the United States

## Housing

How do Amerasian families pay their housing costs? The sponsoring agency pays the first month's rent after their arrival in the United States, or a volunteer puts them up in his or her own quarters. The following month, Amerasian families start to pay for their own housing, regardless of whether they have jobs at this point. For many families, most of the cash assistance they receive goes into housing costs. Often, several families share one apartment. Even when sharing living quarters, our interviewees in the Washington, D.C., area paid an average of $445 per month per family for housing. (See table V.1.)

**Table V.1: Housing Costs for Refugee Families and Individuals, by City of Residence**

| | Mean | Minimum | Maximum | Number |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Washington, D.C. | | | | |
| Family | $445 | $150 | $752 | 30 |
| Individual | 199 | 0 | 350 | 18 |
| Souderton, Pa. | | | | |
| Family | 609 | 200 | 850 | 11 |
| Individual | 210 | 100 | 300 | 5 |
| Philadelphia, Pa. | | | | |
| Family | 300 | 75 | 550 | 36 |
| Individual | 221 | 50 | 400 | 12 |

To minimize housing costs, Amerasian families usually settled in the poorest neighborhoods. An interviewer saw evidence of rodent and roach infestation in the kitchens of several units, and in most units, roach infestation was evident even during the day. In addition, Amerasian families still lived in crowded conditions. For example, an average of five people in the families of our Amerasian interviewees shared one bathroom.

The housing costs of the Amerasian families we interviewed depended on two factors: where they lived and what their income level was. In Souderton, Pennsylvania, an apartment rented for over $500 per month, but incomes were higher and a number of Amerasians had relocated there to obtain jobs in the meatpacking and poultry processing industries. In Philadelphia, the average housing cost was about $400 to $450 per month in the poor neighborhood where many Amerasians had resettled. However, the average housing cost per family in Philadelphia was only about $300 per month because many families shared housing.

When refugees earned more, they tended to want to move to better and safer neighborhoods. Some of the Amerasian families had even bought their own houses. On the other hand, due to the large concentration of Vietnamese in the first area of resettlement, some families wanted to stay there, although under less crowded conditions. Many lived in "little Saigons" and thus did not learn English.

The advantage to Amerasians of staying in concentrated Vietnamese neighborhoods is the social contacts these locales assure. Some, like Souderton, feature organized, healthy recreational facilities where Amerasians can develop discipline, teamwork, a sense of community, and leadership in sports such as soccer. However, most urban places where Vietnamese refugees have congregated do not have such facilities, so Amerasians can be attracted to gangs, alcohol abuse, and sometimes high-stake card games.

Some resettlement agencies are studying levels of gang involvement among Amerasians. Some other agencies have suggested that, to avoid the problem of gang involvement, Amerasians should not be sent to big cities where there are many Vietnamese. However, one advantage of areas of concentrated Vietnamese population is that service agencies are sometimes able to hire a worker who can speak the language, something which is difficult to do where the population is small.

Our survey of resettlement agencies also showed the differences in housing costs encountered by refugees in U.S. cities of different size. Agencies that resettled Amerasians in cities with populations of less than 100,000 reported that an average of 17 percent of the Amerasians experienced problems finding affordable housing; whereas in cities with populations of more than 500,000 inhabitants, 37 percent experienced this problem. Amerasians resettling in smaller cities also had fewer problems involving transportation, crime victimization, and integration into the Vietnamese as well as the larger American community; however, they may have had more problems with discrimination in the smaller American community. It is likely that people in smaller cities are more aware of Amerasians' presence and react more to them, resulting in higher levels of both integration and discrimination in the American community, as compared with the Amerasian experience in larger cities.

## Health Care

Amerasians generally received comprehensive health care at every stage of their migration to the United States. They started in Vietnam with health

screening and, if necessary, treatment of communicable diseases. The PRPC screened and treated them again. Upon arrival in the United States, they went through another screening and possible course of treatment. However, in the United States, even when health care was theoretically available, lack of information, English language skills, and transportation often made it practically inaccessible. For example, an Amerasian in our sample who was contacted by the local clinic to bring her two children in for free immunization failed to do so because she did not realize the importance of immunization and did not have transportation to the clinic.

When Amerasians did seek out health care, they were sometimes frightened away by parts of the system. The stepfather of the Amerasian just mentioned had lost an eye and had poor sight in the other. He went to a doctor to obtain evidence of his disability. One doctor referred him to another, so he accumulated bills without securing any conclusive evidence of his disability. Another Amerasian received repeated billings from a hospital for his first child's birth even after he had provided information several times to process Medicaid papers. He was frightened by the billing and stated that, in the future, he would avoid seeking American medical care as much as possible. Resettlement agencies cannot help all their clients with such problems, especially those people who move to another city. We found that the agencies often were too busy dealing with more recent refugees, or (in the case of a number of agencies) clients did not know how to contact the agency office or workers.

If physical health care was difficult to access, mental health care was even more difficult to secure. The unmet need most commonly cited by resettlement agencies (33 percent) was that for mental health and counseling services. Resettlement workers cited high levels of sexual activity, low levels of marital bonding, conflicts within families, and violent means of resolving conflicts, as aspects of family disfunctioning that called for mental health counseling. However, there are few professional mental health workers who speak Vietnamese, while most Amerasians do not know enough English to work with American counselors. In addition, for cultural reasons, Asians are generally not open to psychotherapy.

Their lack of education and, according to a local resettlement director, their high level of sexual activity increased Amerasians' exposure to AIDS. Unable to communicate in English, Amerasians seek out Vietnamese doctors. However, since there are not enough Vietnamese doctors who are specialists, the medical services Amerasians received were sometimes

restricted to those offered by general practitioners. The Amerasians we interviewed also ran into various culturally determined difficulties in the United States, such as the keeping of appointments (a concept that is applied more loosely in Vietnam).

## Amerasians and Resettlement Agencies

Our interview sample of 100 Amerasians credited resettlement agencies with supplying many types of essential help, including

- furniture (63),
- food (46),
- kitchen utensils (67),
- encouragement (65),
- finding schools (68),
- interpreter services (61), and
- counseling (51).

Overall, our Amerasian interviewees rated the resettlement agencies as follows:

- very good (13),
- good (49),
- okay (26),
- bad (5),
- very bad (4), and
- no opinion (3).

We visited one large resettlement agency—IRC in Washington, D.C.—and found that it had a generous open-door policy, that many people came there for help, and that the Vietnamese caseworker was very knowledgeable about the cases and was much respected by the refugees. Nine Amerasians complained about their resettlement agencies, primarily that they were given some cash (about $220 per person) but no contacts or services. We did not design the study to examine resettlement agencies' performance; however, it appeared to us that several of the dissatisfied Amerasians were resettled by the same agency.

For various reasons, there is a high rate of turnover among social workers at resettlement agencies. Salaries are often very low. Contract renewals can be uncertain. Paperwork can be complicated, especially in cases where grants have been divided among different programs (causing agencies to apply for numerous grants). Some workers told us that the

paperwork might be justified in theory but was just a burden in practice, and that complying with it did not always help their Amerasian clients.

One particular example of this paperwork problem was the requirement of a resettlement plan for each refugee. In view of the large number of refugees, the agency's lack of knowledge about them, and their uncertain job opportunities, it was difficult to develop a resettlement plan with a refugee at the start. Conversely, adherence to such a plan can irritate the refugee. One refugee recounted that he told the social worker: "You keep telling me that I should try to be self-sufficient as soon as I can, but you cannot find me a job, you cannot provide the information I need about schooling—Does self-sufficient mean not being able to rely on workers like you?"

Confronted with situations like these, resettlement agency workers tend to move to more stable, less stressful jobs, and the refugee community thus loses the services of experienced workers. Even at agencies where there are Vietnamese-speaking workers, their caseloads are often too heavy for them to counsel people effectively. Due to the resultant lack of counseling support, crises among refugees tend to increase, and dealing with crises such as suicide and child abuse in turn consumes more of the workers' time.

# The Social Context: Family, Discrimination, and Happiness

Appendixes III, IV, and V have pointed to the importance of family in Vietnamese culture. In this appendix, in order to present the Amerasian family in the context of Vietnamese culture, we address the following questions:

- Were Amerasians discriminated against in Vietnam? If so, in what way, and how did they react? How well did Amerasians relate to neighbors in Vietnam and in the United States, in relation to the comparison groups?
- How close are Amerasians to those in their nuclear families, particularly their mothers, in relation to the comparison groups? Do they think about their fathers?
- How do Amerasians identify themselves, and which culture—American or Vietnamese—do they identify with?

## Discrimination in Vietnam

About 71 percent of the Amerasians in our interview sample reported being discriminated against in Vietnam. Some half-siblings (24 percent), who were not themselves Amerasians, also experienced this discrimination. About 7 percent of the "other Vietnamese" group also reported being targeted for discrimination by the Communist government because their families had worked for the previous regime. In comparison, only 19 percent of Amerasians (versus 17 percent of the other two groups) reported being discriminated against in the United States.

Discrimination against the young Amerasians in our sample took different forms. In the area of education, one individual reported having difficulty in gaining admission to school. Another interviewee reported negative attitudes on the part of teachers. A third individual pointed out that passing or failing depended more on identity than academic performance. Offensive teasing on the part of peers was a common phenomenon.

Amerasians often reacted to this discrimination by fighting (which often led to disciplinary sanctions, including expulsion from school), withdrawal, dropping out, or moving to new homes in economic zones in remote areas of the country. Some Amerasians told us that they accepted as fact the contention that Amerasians were simply not good students. Thus, discrimination was a major contributing factor to low educational achievement among Amerasians in Vietnam.

Not everyone in Vietnam discriminated against Amerasians. Only 13 percent of the Amerasians in our sample expected that their neighbors in Vietnam would have treated them badly had they stayed in Vietnam.

However, by comparison, only 3 percent expected such poor treatment in the United States.

With this discrimination in mind, HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) anticipated that Amerasians would not normally be given full membership in their Vietnamese communities in the United States. Consequently, in early 1988, ORR consulted with the State Department, voluntary agencies, state governments, Vietnamese ethnic organizations, local resettlement agencies, and one Amerasian to plan for effective resettlement. Following their recommendations, ORR established 55 Amerasian resettlement clusters to instill a sense of community through orientation to American culture, recreational activities, and Vietnamese festival parties. These clusters also allow a targeting of federal funds, through an ORR Cooperative Agreement with InterAction, to enhance resettlement services. In addition, a point of contact was established at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) to receive questions and to disseminate information on effective resettlement strategies.

## Amerasian Fathers

Although Amerasians rarely locate their American fathers, most Amerasians think of them often. According to a recent study that surveyed a random sample consisting of 169 Amerasians in 10 cluster sites, almost one fifth (19 percent) "always" thought about their biological fathers, another fifth (21) percent) "frequently" did, and another fifth (23 percent) "sometimes" did.[1] However, the actual parental care responsibilities resided with the mothers in both Vietnam and the United States.

## Amerasian Mothers

### Description

Mothers play a central role in Amerasians' lives. In answering the open-ended question, "Whom did you first grow up with?", 74 percent of the Amerasians in our interview sample simply stated "mother" (compared with 42 percent of siblings and 32 percent of other Vietnamese, who more often identified "parents" in response to this question). Characteristics of the Amerasians' mothers, as described in the RDC data set, are summarized in the following paragraph.

[1]Conversation with Dr. Fred Bemak of Johns Hopkins University concerning his as yet unpublished study.

Their median age was about 49 years. With regard to marital status, 40 percent were married, 36 percent single, and 14 percent widowed. Regarding education, 13 percent had attended no school in Vietnam, 69 percent some primary school, 10 percent secondary school, and only 0.3 percent college or technical school. According to a brief test conducted in PRPC, 11 percent could not read or write any language, 52 percent knew Vietnamese only, and 22 percent knew a little English.

Added to their low educational achievement was the low-skilled nature of the jobs that the mothers of Amerasians held in Vietnam. The majority were in sales (28 percent), domestic and other services (35 percent), and farming (10 percent).

Of the 14,892 Amerasian cases reported in the RDC data set, only about a third included biological mothers. About half of the cases with mothers included only two or three people (typically, the Amerasian, his or her mother, and a sibling).

## Amerasians' Relationships With Their Mothers

Amerasians reported that they were very close (50 percent) or close (22 percent) to their mothers, although some reported that they were not too close (12 percent) or experienced friction often (4 percent). One Amerasian who rated the relationship with his mother as "not too close" tried to choke his mother to death once and told the interviewer that he might attempt it again because of her relationship with her boyfriend. The same Amerasian, however, said that his greatest hope was to save enough money for his mother to visit Vietnam, according to her wish. This pattern of conflict and fusion is that classified as "enmeshment" by family therapy theory.[2]

The sibling groups reported the same level of closeness to their mothers, but the other Vietnamese group reported more closeness ($t = 3.4$; $p = 0.001$). Furthermore, 12 percent of Amerasians reported that they did not know their mothers well enough.

One example of a "friction often" case was intense. One evening this Amerasian caught his mother in bed with a black American boyfriend. He got a knife from the kitchen and chased the naked man out of the apartment building. His mother hired another Amerasian to beat her son in front of her, and then threw him out of her apartment. Two other

[2]See Michael P. Nichols and Richard C. Schwartz, Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991).

Amerasians then noticed that she was alone in her apartment and forced her to let them stay there. At this point, she recalled her Amerasian son to throw the other two out.

Of course, there are also cases at the other extreme, in which the Amerasian children were very loyal to their mothers as prescribed by traditional Vietnamese social norms. In one case exhibiting family harmony, the mother was married to a Vietnamese man and had one child. In the evening, people from her village often slept at a church in town for safety. One evening when her husband remained behind, the village was raided, and he was killed. She did not know which side killed him. To earn a living, she began working at an American base. Returning from work one day, she found her house burned and her burned child removed to the hospital at the American base. The American soldier who drove her every day to visit her child in the hospital fathered her next child. When leaving Vietnam, he asked her to accompany him. She refused. He then asked a close American friend to take care of her, and this man fathered her third child.

After the American withdrawal, her family was extremely poor. The second child tended the flock for a family in a different village at all hours of the day and in all kinds of weather. He later went to town and apprenticed at a car body shop. His two brothers would go to the woods to gather branches and then carry them 10 miles to sell in the market and thus make a meager income. Their relatives rejected them because they brought shame to the extended family.

After the Amerasian Homecoming Act was passed, people offered to purchase one of the two Amerasians from their mother, but she refused to part with either of them, afraid that she would not be able to find them in the United States. She and her sons subsequently applied to be resettled. When interviewed for departure from Vietnam, the oldest son, by then married and the father of a child, stated that he was single so that he could stay with his mother and brothers. In the Philippines Refugee Processing Center (PRPC), the youngest son went to school for the first time, to learn English. He also went to evening class, taught by fellow refugees, to learn Vietnamese. The oldest son had had more education in Vietnam but feigned ignorance so that he would be placed in the lowest class with his youngest brother (in order to help him).

Upon arrival in the Unite States, the youngest son continued to learn Vietnamese by reading local Vietnamese magazines aloud, a word at a

time. All four members of the family also went to English language classes—again with the oldest and the youngest sons in the lowest level so that the one could help the other. The second son briefly enrolled in a job training program, but dropped out after a few days because it was far from home and because he had only had a year of education in Vietnam. All three boys worked the evening shift for a janitorial company, and two of the three also held second jobs. Their combined income was over $2,000 per month. All three gave their paychecks to their mother.

On the strength of this large income, they asked the other two families who lived with them in a two-bedroom apartment to move out. They bought a car. The mother continued to attend two different English language programs in the hope of one day being able to read street signs. She was very proud of the way her children stayed together, stating that she felt like "a queen." A year after arrival, the youngest son got married and subsequently brought his Vietnamese bride home to live with his family. The oldest son continued to send money to Vietnam to support his wife and child. He had inquired about bringing them to the United States, but he felt that he also must keep his relationship to them a secret—afraid that he himself would be deported because he had lied to the Immigration and Naturalization Service about his marital status.

## Amerasians' Identity

We approached the issue of Amerasians' identity from three perspectives—focusing particularly on the question of whether they identified more with Vietnamese or American culture. First, we asked the Amerasians in our sample what they thought of themselves. Second, we looked at their responses on Caplan's value scales.[3] Third, we considered their daily activities.

When asked directly, "Do you think of yourself as Vietnamese, American, or other?"—44 percent chose Vietnamese, 5 percent American, and a significant 50 percent "other" (namely, Amerasian). In addition, these Amerasians were very similar to the Vietnamese, according to their value statements. Overall, the orders of the values rated by Amerasians and by other Vietnamese were very similar. Among the values highly rated by both groups were "not forgetting roots," "respecting elders," "education," "tight family," and "warm and peaceful family." Amerasians even ranked "preserve traditional Vietnamese customs" higher than the other Vietnamese group. Among the lowest rated values for both groups were

[3]Nathan Caplan et al., Boat People and Achievement in America: A Study of Family Life, Hard Work, and Cultural Values (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

"finding enjoyment," "material desire," and "balance between work and play."

Concerning daily activities, Amerasians associated primarily with other Amerasians and Vietnamese. They were more likely to watch Vietnamese TV than the Vietnamese (63 versus 40 percent) and less likely to watch American TV (64 versus 90 percent). In addition, more Amerasians than Vietnamese reported that their favorite pastime was to chat with other Vietnamese (47 versus 17 percent). Vietnamese reported that they attempted to chat with Americans, trying to insinuate themselves into the American culture. Conversely, Amerasians tended to be more exclusive in their preference for Vietnamese culture.

However, we also found that Amerasians continued to be rejected by many of the Vietnamese living in the United States. One Vietnamese individual even approached one of our evaluators and asked whether there was a way to stop Amerasians from coming to the United States—because they disturbed the Vietnamese community here and presented a bad image to the American public. Voluntary agencies reported that about 33 percent of Amerasians had experienced discrimination in the American Vietnamese community. In addition, one black Amerasian reported that white Amerasians looked down upon black Amerasians.

## Summary: Are Amerasians Happy in the United States?

The different sections of our report have delineated Amerasians' difficulties in many areas of life, both in Vietnam and in the United States. First, they were rejected in Vietnam. Then, in the United States, Amerasians have identified with Vietnamese culture, only to be rejected anew by the Vietnamese. Fitting in neither world, they remain "Amerasian"—that is, somewhat different from everyone else.

The purpose of the Amerasian Homecoming Act was to help these Amerasians. Yet the very process of moving to the United States separated them from family members they love and from the only language and culture they know. They expected to learn a new language and a trade, and most acquired neither. An alarming number of Amerasian women have become single mothers just as their mothers were.

These Amerasians were brought to the United States too late to grow up American and thereby become mainstream Americans. Various efforts have been made to help them, including those of the PRPC and the resettlement agencies, and additional aid has been extended through

federal cash and medical assistance programs. However, reductions in funding levels have reduced the effectiveness of each effort. The PRPC has a highly professional American administrative staff, but it teaches English and American culture in a Vietnamese-speaking camp on Filipino soil with Filipino-accent teachers. The program's clients would be better served if the program were relocated to the United States, although the cost would be much greater. The resettlement agencies, many with Vietnamese workers, provided important initial help, but recently their budgets have shrunk at the same time that the number of refugees arriving for resettlement has swollen. The period of eligibility for federal cash and medical assistance has been gradually reduced from 3 years to 8 months, with the possibility of even more reductions in the future.

Many resettled Amerasians gravitated to the poorest ghettos of America and lacked the English language skills to communicate with people around them, as well as the information necessary to take advantage of the resources available to them. Housing costs forced them into residences that were crowded and impermanent. Some of these Amerasians did not have their real families with them. All were cut off from the environment they grew up in that, although often unfriendly to them, at least was familiar and one where they had some ties. They were eager to work in the United States but had few skills, and those who had skills could not always use them.

Overall, did the program to resettle Amerasians in the United States help or hurt them? We asked Amerasians to answer this question themselves, again from a number of angles:

- whether they were happy or sad in Vietnam;
- whether they were happy or sad in the United States;
- what they liked or disliked about each place;
- whether they were happy about leaving Vietnam; and finally,
- whether they were happy about coming to the United States.

We also used established scales to measure the Amerasians' self-esteem, cultural estrangement, and depression. (One reason multiple questions were used is that Vietnamese tend to value the complexity of contradictory answers more than consistency among them.)

The overall results revealed a hardy group. Amerasians managed to survive under difficult conditions, both in Vietnam and in the United States. Sixty-three percent of the Amerasians we surveyed stated that they

were happy in this country, compared with 20 percent who said that they were unhappy. This happiness reflected their psychological resilience and hardiness because, even when they suffered hardship in Vietnam, 48 percent stated that they were happy in Vietnam. A strongly positive correlation between happiness scores in the two places (Vietnam and the United States) would indicate that happiness is generalized and not dependent on factors such as environment. A strongly negative correlation might indicate that environment explains much of the happiness variable. The correlation in our sample was weak: $r = -0.19$; $p = 0.06$. Thus, both generalized hardiness and environmental improvement probably were contributing factors.

What did the Amerasians like and dislike most about Vietnam and the United States? They saw Vietnam and the United States as somewhat opposite, so what they liked about the one country reflected what they didn't like about the other. For example, they preferred the personal and family relationships in Vietnam, which they regarded as more affectionate; they also missed the language, food, and climate of Vietnam. Similarly, what they liked about the United States mirrored what they did not like about Vietnam: the work opportunities, the freedom, the reduced discrimination, and the educational opportunities. Overall, 77 percent of Amerasians said that they were happy about leaving Vietnam, and 87 percent were happy about coming to the United States. (See table VI.1.)

**Table VI.1: What Respondents Liked and Disliked About Vietnam and the United States**

| Response | Amerasian | Sibling | Other Vietnamese |
|---|---|---|---|
| What respondents liked about Vietnam | | | |
| Family, relationships | 68% | 72% | 74% |
| Language, culture, climate, food | 20 | 18 | 17 |
| Work, job, wealth | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| "Nothing" | 9 | 9 | 4 |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **99%** |
| What respondents liked about the U.S. | | | |
| Freedom | 30 | 33 | 33 |
| Work, wealth | 49 | 44 | 33 |
| School | 8 | 22 | 21 |
| No discrimination | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| "Nothing" | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Other ("future," "don't know yet") | 8 | 0 | 13 |
| **Total** | **100%** | **99%** | **101%** |
| What respondents disliked about Vietnam | | | |
| Discrimination | 21 | 11 | 0 |
| Communism, no freedom | 20 | 67 | 24 |
| Lack of work, wealth | 47 | 11 | 59 |
| "Nothing" | 7 | 11 | 12 |
| Other | 4 | 0 | 6 |
| **Total** | **100%** | **99%** | **101%** |
| What respondents disliked about the U.S. | | | |
| Family, relationships | 16 | 43 | 33 |
| Language, culture, climate, food | 29 | 29 | 44 |
| Work, job, wealth | 31 | 14 | 11 |
| Social disorder | 12 | 14 | 11 |
| "Nothing" | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **100%** | **100%** | **99%** |

Of course, not all refugees in our survey had the same experience, and not all spoke with one voice. While 49 percent cited work as what they liked about the United States, 31 percent cited the same factor as what they did not like about the United States. There were also group differences. For example, siblings of Amerasians and other Vietnamese appreciated U.S. schooling more than did Amerasians (22 percent, 21 percent, and 8 percent, respectively).

The final question—which we strategically delayed asking until after we had asked our Amerasian interviewees to review their personal history in both Vietnam and the United States—was which of the two countries they preferred. About four out of five Amerasians voted for the United States, compared with about two out of three of the other groups.

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